

# FREEDOM FIRST

BY

G. N. ACHARYA

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FREEDOM FIRST

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## PREFACE

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**'Freedom First'** The title of this book is not intended to be just a catchy slogan. It is claimed for it that it exactly describes the difference between the Indian and British point of view to the question of the war and India's Freedom. Everybody, in India and in England, wants the Allies to win this war and win it as quickly as possible. Everybody, in India and in England wants that India should attain her Independence at the earliest possible moment. At this point the differences arise.

Boiled down to their barest essentials it seems to me that the difference between the British and Indian point of view is this. Britain says, "we are in the midst of a dreadful war. Let us get through with the job and at the end of it, you will surely have your Freedom." On the other hand Indians, by and large, say, "no, that won't do. We want our Freedom first, not only because we have always wanted it, war or no war, but also because we see clearly that it is the most effective way in which we can contribute to an early and decisive victory of the Allies."

I may also be permitted to add that the title was inspired by no less a person than Mr L. S. Amery, the Secretary of State for India. Is he not the author of the famous slogan 'India First', and is it not a fact that a collection of his speeches is published under the alluring title 'India and Freedom'? And from that to 'Freedom First' is but one step.

Apart, however, from the inspiration of Mr Amery "Freedom First" would never have been written but for the collaboration of my friends and colleagues,

## PREFACE

K. A. Abbas, N. G. Jog and K. U. Kini. To them I owe more, much more, than formal thanks. Thanks are also due to Mr. R. K. Prabhu, News Editor and Mr. J. Mackwan, Chief Reporter of the 'Bombay Chronicle' for the kindly interest they have taken in the progress of this book as also to several friends who have helped in many odd ways with help, sympathy and co-operation.

G. N. ACHARYA.

Bombay, April 1943.

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# 1 THE FLAG IS UNFURLED

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**T**HE old year was fast drawing to a close. In a matter of hours the Twenties would be left behind, and the world would step into a new year—a new era, with new hopes, new problems, new endeavours.

Lahore, at that season and at that hour was cruelly cold. The breeze that blew from the sluggish, slow-moving Ravi, crept in through the thickest clothes and stabbed one with icy daggers. And Lajpatrai Nagar, the vast, temporary city of bamboo and matting on the banks of the river could afford no special protection against the bleak winds of mid winter. The 3,000 delegates who had come to attend the momentous session of the Indian National Congress and the thousands of visitors who thronged Lajpatrai Nagar shivered and stamped their feet on the moist ground and blew upon their hands to keep themselves from becoming entirely numb.

But in the vast tent where the debate grew and fiery speeches flowed, and around the flag mast in front, which reared its 200 feet height, its entire length studded with glimmering electric lights, into the night sky and at whose top could occasionally be seen through the night fog, a vast national Tricolour fluttering gently, a strange excitement prevailed. The inward glow of patriotism, the tingling excitement of a momentous decision, the quickening of the pulse and the rush of blood through one's veins, the fever heat of impending battle—these were in marked contrast to the cold wintry fog that clung to the city of

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hutments around and stretched itself into the far beyond

The Congress was in a cauldron in Lahore. Ideas and ideals were boiling on the fires of patriotism kindled by the ever growing arrests and other acts of repression. A year before at Calcutta the Congress had given the British Government a year of grace to redeem its pledge of Dominion Status for India. The year had passed, and but for an announcement by the Viceroy about a forthcoming Round Table Conference, nothing had been done to meet the national demand for *Swaraj* which, till then, was interpreted as Dominion Status within the British Empire. On the contrary, public feeling had been roused to a high pitch by the utterances of Mr Wedgewood Benn, the Labour Secretary of State for India, who had been assuring the world that Dominion Status was already in action in India for a decade!

The events of the year had sounded the death knell of the era of petitions and deputations, of constitutional representation of national grievances and requests for increasing doses of self-government. The waverers, the constitutionalists and moderates could no more find a place in the Congress. The Congress was henceforth to derive its strength from the ranks of radical youth and in their name speak a language of defiance and revolutionary action. And symbolically enough the mantle of presidentship was passing from father to son, from the stately old lawyer, Motilal Nehru to his restless son Jawaharlal. The Congress was to be guided by the energy and vision of a new generation.

Having been responsible for postponing the demand for Independence at Calcutta, Mahatma Gandhi spon-

sored the main political resolution of the session, which, *inter alia* declared that the word *Swaraj* in the first article of the Congress Constitution shall mean complete Independence. The debate on it had waxed long and loud, not because there were many dissentients as far as the goal was concerned, but because there were many who did not like the references made to the Viceroy in the resolution and the details of the programme suggested by Mahatma Gandhi. Although the discussion ended at 10 p.m. on the night of December 31, voting took another two hours. There were as many as 14 amendments and several of them were pressed. By a happy accident it was not until midnight that counting was over and the results announced and exactly at that hour the ultimatum given at Calcutta expired.

As the session approached its climax scenes of unbounded enthusiasm prevailed inside the enclosure. The 30,000 people packed in the tent were warming up to the situation. As the division and counting proceeded, lady volunteers broke into song, and soon men and women both in and outside the tent were singing songs of Freedom in chorus. And as soon as the results were announced, the excited young men 'kidnapped' the Congress President, and immediately after, Jawaharlal Nehru and the other leaders as well as the rank and file joined in a solemn flag salutation. Thus was the formula of Dominion Status torn to pieces and thrown into the waters of the Ravi.

And during the 13 years that have since elapsed, despite the many vicissitudes and the changes of fortune that have befallen the Congress and the country, the people as a whole have remained true to that ideal. We have witnessed the rousing elation of the first Civil Disobedience Movement, the ultimate frus-



tration of the Second, the farce of the Round Table Conferences, the return of the Parliamentary mentality, the apparent contradiction and recession of the Congress accepting the reforms and running the Provincial governments, the coming of war and its disappointments and frustrations, the Individual Satyagraha at the call of Mahatma Gandhi, the hopes and disillusionment arising out of the Cripps episode, and the latest troubles and confusions

And through it all the people have remained steadfast to their ideal, and each year, in city and town and village they have taken the pledge of Independence solemnly declaring

' We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete Independence '

In fact it was Mahatma Gandhi who was the last to change<sup>1</sup> As late as February 1937 he stated in the course of a letter to Mr H S Polak that if Dominion Status with the right to secede were offered, he for one would accept it. Of course no such offer was made. But, shortly after, in the course of his speech at the National Convention of all the Congress members of legislatures, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, chided Mahatma Gandhi on that issue. He characterised all discussion about Dominion Status as academic talk. "It is many years now since India put that idea by and there can be no reversion to it. Today with the

whole world in the cauldron of change and disaster threatening it, this lawyer's jargon seems strangely out of place."

I suppose Mahatmaji took the dig with a smile. But in the course of the next three years he had completely changed his opinion. Writing in the 'Harijan' of March 16, 1940, he categorically stated that in making the statement in his letter to Mr Polak he had no authority to bind anyone else. "Whatever may be said of me, no charge of change of policy can be brought against the Congress. So far as I am concerned, I have changed. Experience since gained and maturer reflection have led me to think that Dominion Status even of the Westminster variety cannot suit India's case."

Maybe, Mahatmaji is slow to change his opinions and convictions. But other politicians are more adept at knowing which way the popular wind is blowing. Complete Independence had become the slogan of Indian Nationalism and no political party which sought to represent the masses could afford to ask for anything less. That was why the plenary session of the All-India Muslim League resolved at Lucknow on October 17, 1937 that Independence shall be its object.

"Resolved that the object of the All-India Muslim League shall be the establishment in India of full Independence in the form of a federation of free democratic states in which the rights and interests of the Mussalmans and other Minorities are adequately and effectively safeguarded in the Constitution."

The subsequent policies pursued by the Muslim League and the demand for 'Pakistan' as it is called in popular parlance, have cast some doubts about the

real objective of the League But this is wholly unwarranted The League has never abrogated its resolution on Independence and its demand for Pakistan is not conceived as being in any way opposed to or inconsistent with its demand for Independence of India This point was made perfectly clear by Mr Mahomed Ali Jinnah, the League leader in the course of his speech to the Council of the All-India Muslim League at Delhi as recently as November 9, 1942 Mr Jinnah said "This Government which has been in this sub continent for 150 years or 160 years is not a Government with the sanction of the people behind it It is a Government imposed on the Moghul system The sanction behind it are British machine-guns and bayonets not the sanction of the people Now there has been aroused a great political consciousness among the people and we want our freedom and Independence We want to be masters of our own affairs in our own land and we would like to say good bye and farewell to the British administration over this sub-continent Our proposal for Pakistan presupposes the freedom and Independence of India "

Just as the Muslim League does or is compelled to do things on the lines of the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha closely follows the League As was only to be expected, following close on the heels of the League the Hindu Mahasabha also adopted Independence as its object The session of the Mahasabha which met at Ahmedabad from December 30 1937 to January 1 1938, under the chairmanship of Mr V D Savarkar, who had only a few months before obtained complete freedom, adopted a resolution defining the aim of the Mahasabha as 'the maintenance, protection and promotion of the Hindu race, Hindu culture and Hindu civilisa-

tion and the advancement of the glory of the Hindu Rashtra and with a view to secure them, *the attainment of Purna Swaraj, i.e., absolute political Independence by legitimate means*’

Thus it will be seen that through all attempts to reconcile the insistent demands of Indian Nationalism with the reluctant concessions of British Imperialism, the ideal of Complete Independence has never been given up, and that, on the other hand, it has won more and more protagonists

What then is the meaning and implications of this slogan of Indian Nationalism? Listen to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Speaking at the National Convention he said “What is this Independence? A clear, definite, ringing word, which all the world understands, with no possibility of ambiguity Let us be clear about it Independence means national freedom in the fullest sense of the word, it means as our pledge has stated, a severance of the British connection It means anti-Imperialism and no compromise with Empire an empire exploiting the Indian people and numerous other peoples in different parts of the world I want my country to have nothing to do with this enormous engine of exploitation in Asia and Africa ”

Earlier still, in the course of his presidential address at Lahore Panditji had said “Independence for us means complete freedom from British domination and British Imperialism Having attained our freedom I have no doubt that India will welcome all attempts at world co operation and federation and will even agree to give up part of her own Independence to a large group of which she is an equal member But India could never be an equal member of the

Commonwealth, unless Imperialism and all that it implies is discarded.... The real thing is the conquest of power ... A test of this power would be the entire withdrawal of the alien army of occupation and economic control. Let us, therefore, concentrate on these and the rest will follow."

From the foregoing account it must be obvious that when Mahatma Gandhi forged that fateful slogan "Quit India" he was doing nothing more than putting in his own inimitable way the clear and logical development of an ideal which every party with pretensions to mass following had adopted. But it happened that when Mahatma Gandhi did come out with the slogan, Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the first to point out that some of the implications of "Quit India" may be inopportune, till Mahatma Gandhi explained that "Quit India" did not mean the physical withdrawal of the British, nor did it exclude honourable co-operation in joint defence.

The Japanese aggressor who at that time stood poised at India's door, while his propaganda machine emitted the warmest love and affection for the Indian people, has since taken off his mask, and places like Chittagong and Calcutta have had their 'baptism' of fire. Therefore, just now even, some of the most ardent advocates of Independence are prone to temporise and lay greater and more urgent emphasis on co-operation in joint defence.

But it must be emphasised that all that has happened, since the nation, as represented by and symbolised in the Congress, turned its back on the old order of things, cut itself adrift from its old moorings of loyalty and constitutionalism, and made a firm demand for Independence in a spirit of challenge, 13

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long years ago, has gone to show that both the leaders and the rank and file, have been clear in their minds about what Independence meant and have been prepared to pay its full price. And the current experiences have served as but stern reminders of the price of Freedom

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## 2 NOT FOR OURSELVES ALONE

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**A**LTHOUGH, looking through the chronicle of events that preceded the war, it is easy to notice a hundred signs and hints of the impending catastrophe, and recognise the clear shadows cast by coming events, it would seem as if the Indian public were not over-much agitated about the war. They seemed to feel that the men of Munich who were in the saddle recognised no limit to their policy of appeasement.

The subjects which occupied public attention in India in that pre-war August, were the Prohibition policy of the Congress governments, and the disputes within the Congress between the Rightists on the one hand and the Leftists in general and Subhas Chandra Bose in particular, on the other, with the affairs of the OM Mandli and the doings of Dada Lekhraj affording an occasional comic relief from the strain of political controversy.

Provincial autonomy was being worked in all the Provinces. Congress was, perhaps, at the zenith of its power and popularity. *At the same time it was showing signs of disruption.* Things came to a head when Subhas Bose organised a day of protest on July 9, against two resolutions passed by the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay, the previous June. The Working Committee of the Congress answered this step on August 11 by disqualifying Bose from presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee *and debarred him from membership of any elective Congress Committee for three years from August 1939.*

While this controversy was calling forth public excitement and partisan vituperation, another issue

had come to a head in Prohibition. Unfortunately the introduction of this 'brave reform' in Bombay was preceded by great opposition both on account of itself and on account of the Urban Immovable Property Tax which was levied in Bombay and Ahmedabad to offset the deficit caused by the fall of excise revenue. The agitation against the tax culminated in a demonstration which was held on the same day, August 1, 1939, on which Prohibition was inaugurated. In the course of this demonstration the police opened fire and several persons were injured.

Although, things were known to be heading for a crisis, the foreign scene held so little attention that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who is acknowledged as India's Ambassador, left Calcutta by plane to Chungking on August 20. Reports of his adventures in Chungking dug outs, from where he watched Japanese bombers, appeared in Indian newspapers and were read with great interest.

And when on September 3, His Excellency the Viceroy issued a declaration 'that war has broken out between His Majesty's Government and Germany' and confidently asserted that "India will make her contribution on the side of human freedom as against the rule of force, and will play a part worthy of her place among the great nations and historic civilizations of the world" all the minor controversies and local issues were swept away, and the war rightfully occupied the centre of the public stage.

Going through the files and records of those days one is amazed at the tremendous weight and unanimity of opinion held and expressed in this country on the issue of war. From Mahatma Gandhi to the humble worker avidly discussing the day's news over his 'single cha,' everybody was agreed that Britain represented the



forces of progress and was right in going to war. The only criticism was that she should have fought Hitler long ago and not allowed him to grow as strong as he had become.

The loyalist elements in the country, of course, lost no time in proclaiming their loyalty. As early as August 25, Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab, made an impressive re-affirmation of the readiness of the Punjab, the sword arm of India, as he called it, to stand shoulder to shoulder with Great Britain in the event of war.

He was soon followed by His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad, His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, the rulers of Kapurthala, Jodhpur, Kolhapur, Bhawalpur, Sitamau, Lunawada, etc, down to the last of the 650 and odd Princes and Rulers who offered to place their services at the disposal of His Majesty

Among other expression of opinion, a statement was issued on September 8, signed by Dr Rabindranath Tagore, Sir Manmathanath Mukherji and several other Hindu leaders of Bengal, calling upon India to stand by Britain and "resist the disastrous policy of domination by force. No Indian would desire that England should lose the battle for freedom she is fighting today"

This sentiment was endorsed by the Working Committee of the National Liberal Federation which met in Bombay under the Chairmanship of Sir Chimanlal Setalvad and adopted a resolution which stated *inter alia* that the duty of the country was "definitely to range itself on the side of Britain"

The Working Committee of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha went one step further and condemned the spirit of bargaining and of taking advantage of the

crisis and said that as the task of defending India from any military attack was a matter of common concern to the people of India and the British Government, there was room for co-operation. The resolution left no doubt that the co-operation of the Hindu Mahasabha would be forthcoming in ample measure in this respect.

As for the Indian National Congress its foreign policy has never been in doubt. It has been anti-fascist throughout. The passionate loyalty of India, as represented by the Congress, to the cause of World Freedom was and is no less intense than her steadfast loyalty to her own freedom. It was only when by one of the strangest quirks of history, Imperial Britain took up arms against the fascist aggressors, that the Indian conscience was put to a terrible test. This conflict of loyalty has been, and still is, the excruciating problem of Indian youth.

While the world as a whole hugged the belief, hope or fear (each country or section according to its proclivities), that war would yet be avoided, the Indian National Congress alone was convinced that war was coming. Whether it is explained as the inescapable eruption of Imperialism or the inevitable logic of fascism such prescience on the part of the Congress was remarkable and unique. In session after session the Congress pronounced solemn warnings about the inevitability of the armageddon.

Nor did the Congress stop merely at shrieking, Cassandra like, prophecies of the evil days to come. It laid down its fundamental policy regarding the war long before the war was declared, long even before world opinion thought it possible. It clearly enunciated and reiterated a two fold policy of sympathy with the victims of aggression and called for an alignment

of the progressive forces throughout the world. Again and again Congress spokesmen like Pandit Nehru condemned Fascism, even when Fascist representatives like Ribbentrop were the favourites at the Clivedon set drawing rooms. India's sympathy for China, first victim of fascist brigandage, dates from a time when China was regarded as a subject not fit for polite conversation in European diplomatic gatherings.

There is no other country in the world, not even Soviet Russia which can claim such a prophetic vision and devotion to its ideals as India represented in the Congress.

Far way back in 1925 the late Rabindranath Tagore went as India's cultural ambassador to China and was responsible in no small measure to bring the sorry tale of oppression and tyranny which was beginning to be opposed by a resurgent China to the attention of the world. And as early as 1927 the Congress sent its "warmest greetings to the people of China and its assurances of full sympathy with them in their fight for emancipation" and would have also sent a medical mission if the government had not refused passports. Ten years later, however, the Congress did succeed in sending a well equipped ambulance and a small group of doctors as a gesture of goodwill.

The bond of friendship between the two countries has been finally sealed by the death in distant China of Dr D. Kotnis, one of the members of the Congress medical unit while engaged in his mission of Mercy.

All India condemned Mussolini's aggression in Abyssinia. The story is now well known how Jawaharlal Nehru refused to meet the Duce in spite of a pressing invitation, during the spring of 1936, when he was in Italy on his way back to India, after the death of his

wife in Switzerland That winter the Congress at its plenary session passed a resolution taking note of the spread of fascism and the possibility of a world conflagration "In the event of such a world war taking place there is a grave danger of Indian man-power and resources being utilised for the purposes of British Imperialism, and it is therefore necessary for the Congress to warn the country against this and prepare it to resist such exploitation of India and her people No credits must be voted for such a war and voluntary subscriptions and war loans must not be supported "

Again the Haripura session of the Congress (19-21, February 1938), Subhas Chandra Bose presiding, passed a resolution which read in part —

' The people of India desire to live in peace and friendship with their neighbours and with all other countries and for this purpose wish to remove all causes of conflict between them Striving for their own freedom and Independence as a nation they desire to respect the freedom of others and to build up their strength on the basis of international co-operation and goodwill

"Fascist aggression has increased and unabashed defiance of international obligations has become the avowed policy of fascist powers British foreign policy has consistently supported the fascist powers It is helping in the drift to Imperialist war

' India can be no party to such an Imperialist war and will not permit her man-power and resources to be exploited in the interests of British Imperialism *Nor can India join any war without the express consent of her people."*

The last sentence is most important as the Congress has since consistently stuck to that position But the British Proconsuls in Delhi and Whitehall were not inclined to heed the feeble voice of India The policy of appeasement still continued, culminating in the

of the progressive forces throughout the world. Again and again Congress spokesmen like Pandit Nehru condemned Fascism, even when Fascist representatives like Ribbentrop were the favourites at the Clivedon set drawing rooms. India's sympathy for China, first victim of fascist brigandage, dates from a time when China was regarded as a subject not fit for polite conversation in European diplomatic gatherings.

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shame of Munich Nehru was once again in Europe. He spent much time in Madrid and Barcelona fraternising with the hard-pressed Spanish Government. His attempts to send a foodship to the beleaguered garrison, however, failed, because the ship carrying food grains bought from subscriptions raised in India never reached Barcelona.

Jawahar was in Prague during the Sudetan crisis. Fresh from the harrowing scenes of Europe he moved at the next session of the Congress a resolution which was a peremptory warning. It was in moving this resolution that he declared that the League of Nations at Geneva was "nothing more than a tombstone of peace." After describing Europe as he had seen it he said "We cannot keep quiet when these murders of democracies are going on. India must dissociate herself from British foreign policy and line up with freedom and democracy-loving countries. India is on the threshold of her freedom, and she is bound to play an important role in the world's history. Therefore she cannot remain indifferent."

At his instance the Congress adopted a resolution disapproving of and disassociating itself from British foreign policy culminating in the Munich Pact, the Anglo-Italian agreement and the recognition of Rebel Spain. This policy had constituted the resolution stated, a betrayal of Democracy, and had sided and encouraged Fascist powers in committing breaches of the system of Collective security and the destruction of democratic countries. Therefore it had become urgently necessary for India to direct her own foreign policy as an independent nation, thereby keeping aloof from both Imperialism and Fascism pursuing her path of peace and freedom.

That was the first warning to Government.

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The second warning followed soon. It was contained in a resolution adopted by the All-India Congress Committee on May 1, 1939 at Calcutta.

The shadows of war were lengthening in Europe and an amendment to the Government of India Act, 1935, was in contemplation. It was intended to pull back into the Viceroy's hands, in case of war, the very considerable powers of self-government enjoyed by the 11 provinces.

Also a small body of Indian Troops had been despatched towards Aden. The AICC disapproved of this move and expressed its determination to oppose the amendment to the Government of India Act. The resolution ended with these words: "Provincial Governments are warned to be ready to carry out the policy in this respect as may be determined by the AICC or the Working Committee as the case may be."

That was the second warning.

But the Government heeded not. The proposed amendment was hurried through a worried and distracted Parliament. It introduced a new section (126 A) by which practically the entire power of the executive authority in India became vested in the Governor General-in-Council. That was just three days before the war. It was by virtue of the powers vested in him by this additional provision that the Governor General forthwith promulgated the Defence of India Ordinance.

Further the life of the Central Assembly was prolonged by one more year. And in spite of an earlier declaration by the Assembly that no Indian Troops should be sent abroad without the consent of the Legislature, more troops were sent to Egypt and Malaya.



Therefore the Working Committee of the Congress which met at Wardha (9-12, August 1939) resolved to dissociate themselves from the Government policy and to "take such steps as may be necessary to give effect to the Congress policy." As a first step the Committee called upon all Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending the next session of the Assembly. Further the committee reminded the Provincial Governments not to assist in war preparations and to be prepared for resignation or removal in carrying out this policy.

That was the third warning.

But when the time came India was declared a belligerent without the formality of consulting either the Central Assembly, which was in session at the time or the Provincial Assemblies most of which were also actually in session.

The feelings of all Indians at this wanton disregard of Indian opinion was admirably summed up by Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant, Premier of the United Provinces, in a speech in the Provincial Assembly. "How very galling it is to us that we should not have any say in those matters of vital importance which are of intimate concern to everyone amongst us. We are asked to fight, not because we choose to fight, but because England wants us to fight. None of the provincial governments were even shown the courtesy of being consulted in this matter or in any matters pertaining to the war. Even that nominally representative body, the Central Assembly, was not consulted. Is our position no better than that of a vassal or of a serf or a galley slave, whose life is at the disposal of his master? He cannot say whether he will enter the lists or not. He must when he is asked to. Mr Chamberlain said that the New Order would be based on mutual confi-

dence and mutual trust This is the trust that has been reposed in us"

That is what Pandit Pant said on October 27, 1939 But it is a matter of speculation what he might have said a few weeks earlier Doubtless he would have subscribed to the same principle ; but he might have been prepared to overlook it For, in the sudden emotional atmosphere created by the war, Indian opinion was not inclined to be too touchy about its ancient quarrel with Britain

That its intense fear and hatred of Nazism had induced in the Congress a mood of co-operation with all forces fighting against Nazism for the time being is borne out by the long manifesto issued by the Congress Working Committee after deep deliberation, immediately after the declaration of war This statement which is "destined to take a permanent place in the literature of freedom," (ET)\* noted that the British Government had declared India as a belligerent country without the consent of the Indian people but at once proceeded to define where its sympathies lay between the two warring parties The Congress had "repeatedly declared its entire disapproval of the ideology and practice of Fascism and Nazism and their glorification of war and violence" The Committee had in the past repeatedly condemned Nazi acts of aggression and even now unhesitatingly condemned the latest aggression of the Nazi Government in Germany against Poland and sympathised with those who resisted it

At the same time the issue of peace and war in India must be decided by the Indian people and not imposed from outside Co-operation could not be obtained by compulsion and imposition "Co-operation must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which

both consider to be worthy" The Committee took note of the declaration of France and Britain that they were fighting for democracy, but India could not "associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her" The Working Committee, therefore, invited the British Government to "declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and Imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular, how these aims are going to be given effect to in the present"

The Committee left no doubt about its own stand "If the war is to defend the *Status quo*, imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privilege, then India can have nothing to do with it If, however, the issue is democracy and a world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it The Committee are convinced that the interests of Indian democracy do not conflict with the interests of British Democracy But there is an inherent and ineradicable conflict between democracy for India or elsewhere and Imperialism and Fascism If Great Britain fights for the maintenance and extension of democracy, then she must necessarily end Imperialism in her own possession, establish full democracy in India, and the Indian people must have the right of self determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference and must guide her own policy

A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic co operation She will work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy, utilising the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity"

At the same time the Working Committee were not free from apprehension "It will be infinite tragedy," they said, "if even this terrible war is carried on in the spirit of Imperialism and for the purpose of retaining this structure which is itself the cause of war and human degradation"

The Committee had also a word to tell the Princes who had rushed in with men, money and statements "If they must make their professions in favour of democracy abroad, the committee would suggest that their first concern should be the introduction of democracy within their own states in which today undiluted autocracy reigns supreme"

And finally the Committee defined its conception of victory and peace by declaring that "they do not look forward to a victory of one people over another or to a dictated peace, but to a victory of real democracy for all the people of all countries and a world freed from the nightmare of violence and Imperialist oppression."

That the Congress should apparently forget its quarrel with Imperialism because of its hatred of Facism shows its keen desire to take an active part in the struggle and share in the sacrifice The first wave of sympathy for Britain and her allies was symptomatic It proved that the heart of India was with the Allies in spite of its head being against Imperialism If Britain had clarified her war aims to the satisfaction of nationalist opinion in this country all the succeeding troubles would have been avoided But Britain refused to do so and even now in spite of all the eye wash of the Atlantic Charter, there is no clearcut exposition of post war freedom

But the manifesto of the Working Committee made its anti Nazi stand clear once for all It had a very

## FREEDOM FIRST

good reception all over the world because India was not selfishly asking for her own freedom even if it be at the sacrifice of others but definitely proclaimed its championship of freedom for all.

Mahatma Gandhi in a separate statement issued from Sewagram on September 15, 1939, brought out this point clearly. He said in part:

"The Working Committee's statement on the world crisis was prepared by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

The author of the statement is an artist. Though he cannot be surpassed in his implacable opposition to Imperialism in any shape or form, he is a friend of the English people. And he is a humanitarian in the sense that he reacts to every wrong, no matter where perpetrated. Hence the statement is a manifesto addressed not only to his own countrymen, not only to the British Government and the British people but it is addressed also to the nations of the world including those that are exploited like India. He has compelled India, through the Working Committee, to think not merely of her own freedom, but of the freedom of all exploited nations of the world."

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\* The Letters E T occurring in this book refer to Edward Thompson's book 'Enlist India for Freedom'.

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## 3 INTO THE WILDERNESS

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**F**IVE PM September 3, 1939 We stood restlessly around the creed machine and eagerly watched the messages as they were ticked away one after another on the long unrolling sheet No announcement yet.

For over a week, the city had been in a fever of excitement Rumours had swept through like the wind The price-pushing racket was already on We had watched the ships of the Royal Indian Navy in the dockyards as their hulks were painted war grey. We had seen mysterious movements of troops and ships

Germany had marched her legions into Poland three days earlier The British Government had given an ultimatum which had expired six hours before In fact the BBC had long ago announced the declaration of war And yet Reuter was silent

I suppose as usual the message had gone to Delhi And at Delhi—as in all government offices—the slogan was ‘we work from eleven to five and don’t bother us on Sundays’ That must have been the reason for the delay.

At last the message came through, and I hurried out to see what was happening, out in the city The usual holiday crowds thronged the sea front At least some of the people must have known that war was on But most of the citizens were going about as if nothing unusual had happened

Not so the police They were busy—rounding up the Germans There were well over 300 of them—Jews and ‘Aryans’ included It was their last day of free-

dom in this country. They were all being taken in by the dragnet. Police vans were going from street to street collecting them. At first they were all being brought to the strongly-guarded Cowasji Jehangir Hall. Nobody was allowed to come near.

The police would tell us nothing. Their nerves were on edge. Round about midnight, making my umpteenth trip to the Cowasji Jehangir Hall, I saw a bus load of Germans, wrapped in sheets, sitting doleful and silent, while a police officer with a brace of revolvers hanging from his belt kept watch. I said 'good night,' making it as cheery as I could. The officer looked startled. I tried to make a polite inquiry. "Go about your business, go about your business," he hissed. I attempted to explain that part of my business was to talk to him. He half pulled one of his revolvers out of its jacket. I walked away. It was the symbol of the police attitude throughout the war. The heyday of their glory had come.

Next morning the citizens were awakened, as usual, by the thud of newspapers, dropped into their rooms by nimble and invisible news-boys, as they lay lazily in bed. And finding 'WAR' splashed on the front pages of their papers, they sat up with a jerk. And through the confused heap of hopes, questionings, apprehensions, and fears that vaguely raced through their minds there was one thought which kept insistently bobbing up all the time. And that was this. "What does this mean to us? Is this the dawn of Freedom? Does it mean that we are on the threshold of that Independence after which we have been hankering so long for which we have suffered and sacrificed so much?"

And to answer this question they looked—most of them, at any rate, if not all—to the Indian National

Congress, the one organisation which for half a century had been the mouthpiece and exponent of all India's Nationalist urges, desires and aspirations, and above all to Mahatma Gandhi who had in the past so often and so correctly given expression to what they felt vaguely in their bones

But in the breast of every Congressman there was a conflict, and in the heart of the Mahatma there was anguish. Even before the official declaration of war he had received a telegram from the Viceroy. He took the first train for Simla. And more humanitarian than politician, he broke down and unburdened himself before the phlegmatic Lord John Bull.

"It almost seems as if Herr Hitler knows no God but brute force" he declared in a statement issued after the interview. "I told His Excellency that my own sympathies were with England and France and from the purely humanitarian standpoint I told him that I could not contemplate without being stirred to the very depths, the destruction of London which had hitherto been regarded as impregnable. I have become disconsolate. In the secret of my heart I am in perpetual quarrel with God that he should allow such things to go on. My non-violence seems almost impotent. But the answer comes at the end of the daily quarrel that neither God nor non violence is impotent. Impotence is in men. I must try on without losing faith even though I may break in the attempt."

Gandhi was at the same time aware that the Indian people as a whole could think of no alternative to armed resistance against international brigandage. It was this knowledge which made him say—"with my irrepressible and out and out non-violence, I know that I could not represent the national mind and I should



cut a sorry figure if I tried to do so I told His Excellency as much "

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was away at Chungking He cut short his trip and hastened back to India Even when he was at Rangoon he announced that the Congress did not approach the problem with a view to taking advantage of Britain's difficulties

The question exercised the minds of the rank and file of the Congress as much as that of the leaders Lobbies in Provincial Assemblies hummed with war talk The decision to fight Hitler was hailed with approbation At the same time there was disappointment that the Congress and its Ministries were not consulted The Bombay Government which had gone to Poona, as usual hurried through current business, adjourned the Assembly and came back to Bombay so as to be ready for all developments

The Congress is a party of action It acted swiftly A meeting of its Working Committee was called at Wardha for September 8 It was summoned in such haste that the Congress President could not arrive till the next day and the meeting had to be postponed

In view of the momentous nature of the question at issue Subhas Chandra Bose against whom the Committee had taken disciplinary action hardly a month before, Mr M S Aney, Acharya Narendra Dev and Mr Jai Prakash Narain were present by special invitation Pandit Nehru also was not a member of the Committee But Congress does not care for such formalities He had dashed from Chungking to Wardha and joined in the deliberations on September 10 Presently he was officially included as a member of the Committee

An attempt was also made to enlist the co operation of Mr M A Jinnah and to obtain his "assistance

in shaping the Working Committee's decision on the critical situation " But in answer to a telegram to that effect sent by Babu Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, Mr Jinnah expressed his inability to go. The Committee deliberated for four days before issuing a statement

Many conflicts had to be reconciled. Firstly, the Communists, the members of the Forward Bloc and other Leftists tended to think that Britain's misfortune was India's opportunity. Had not Bose talked of an ultimatum only six months earlier? But that was not the Mahatma's method.

The Congress could have no intention of bargaining with England at this critical juncture. Our claim for Freedom had not arisen from this crisis. It was an old claim.

Should they then offer unconditional co operation? They would have liked to ask for some terms—at least the guarantee that they had the freedom to fight.

Then again there was the question of Non violence. For twenty years under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi they had fought with clean open non violent methods. Should they now take the road to bloodshed? After talking for years in terms of Non violence should they now turn war-mongers, "mouth fighters, pen fighters fighters with other men's blood" and do things which they had refused to do for their own freedom? And for what? That was the crux of the question.

The Mahatma tried to check them from the path of violence altogether. But if they must plunge into war, he counselled them to do so without bargaining. But for what? That question had yet to be resolved.

So they decided to raise the issue in a categorical manner (See Chapter II) They had not much hope But in view of the gravity of the occasion and the rapid course of events they did not wish to prejudge the issue Having raised it they preferred to wait and see the reaction of Government.

Meanwhile a sub-committee consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Sardar Patel was set up to deal with all questions which arose in connection with the war

The Congress was in earnest They were in no way happy at the prospect of throwing away power in the Provinces which they had won after so much struggle and of which they were making admittedly good use It is well known that some ministers were critical of the Congress move to resign office Half a loaf, they said, was better than no bread But the rank and file hailed the decision enthusiastically On questions of principle there could be no compromise

The Congress intended the threatened resignation as a grave and serious warning to Britain This is clear from a simple unpublished fact which it may be permissible to reveal at this distance of time On September 17, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru drafted a circular letter, giving instructions to the Premiers of the Congress Provinces as to how they should place their view of the draft resolution to be moved in the Provincial Assemblies before their respective Governors To this draft, Sardar Patel made a significant addition suggesting that the Premiers should tell their respective Governors 'that the resolution of the Working Committee cannot be treated lightly and if they do so, they will do it at their own peril'

But the Congress stayed its hands for a while because Mahatma Gandhi was holding delicate nego-

tations with the Viceroy Trunk calls flashed throughout India Delhi became the centre of the country's hopes The Congress President and Jawaharlal Nehru kept watch at Delhi On September 30, further instructions were issued to the Congress Premiers to defer action on the National Demand resolution Meanwhile the Ministries decided to rush through beneficial legislative and administrative measures The secretariats were a bee-hive of activity Ministers burnt midnight oil In Bombay, for instance a tenancy act, a debt relief act, and an act to regulate and ameliorate the conditions of shop assistants were put on the Statute book Rules for the compulsory provident fund of school teachers, was one of the parting gifts of the administration

But everything ended in smoke The Viceroy failed to touch or grapple with the fundamental issues raised by the Congress The Congress case is that secondary matters were brought up and attempts made to evade and distract They were soon disillusioned and amidst scenes of tremendous popular demonstrations the Congress Ministries resigned

The late Seth Jamnalal Bajaj was fond of quoting a verse from the *Mahabharata* to describe the British handling of India and Indian opinion with reference to the war He used to say that the Indian policy of the British Government was such as to "make a dumb man to find tongue and a lame man to leap over mountains" In the light of the events narrated so far and to be sketched hereafter, the reader will be able to judge how far and in what sense Mr Bajaj was correct in his description of British policy

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## 4 LINLITHGOW LUMBERS ALONG

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**H**IS Excellency Viletor Alexander John Hope, Marquess of Linlithgow, Viceroy and Governor-General of India had some reason to look with satisfaction at the 52 years which had elapsed since he was born on September 24, 1887. Eldest son of a Marquess of the realm, his varied and fruitful career was crowned with the richest crown of all, the Viceroyalty of India

Nor was the record of his Viceroyalty such as to depress him over much. He had no doubt some initial difficulties about the inauguration of Provincial Autonomy and the preparations for the Federal part of the Government of India Act and other miscellaneous matters. But he had no occasion to miss a night's sleep on any account, nor his favourite recreations of golf and shooting either.

But on August 24, 1939, a month before his birthday, which the noble Marquess was looking forward to spend in his Simla Lodge, the Government of Hitler signed a Non-aggression pact with the Soviet, against which the Fuehrer was wont to hurl his most thunderous invectives. Just a week afterwards, on September 1, 1939, the armed might of Germany was marching ruthlessly into the heart of Poland. That was the end of many good dreams. Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of England slobbered pitifully before Parliament. "It is a sad day for all of us" he said, "but for none is it sadder than for me. Everything I have done, worked for, hoped for and believed in during my public life has crashed in ruins. The only thing left to me is to

devote what powers I have for Victory I cannot tell what part I may be allowed to play, but I trust I will live to see the day when Hitlerism is destroyed and a restored and liberated EUROPE has been reestablished "

And to add a cruel edge to the already sharp blow, khadi-clad sub editors in musty newspaper offices all over India were marking that word EUROPE, in the last sentence, to be set up in capitals, and millions of brown men, poring over their papers next morning were pointing out that word to each other

But the Viceroy was not worried. He slowly stroked his ample chin and planned to do things with the pomp and dignity which must necessarily accompany all Viceregal movements and activities. As a gesture to the curious and vociferous millions of India who had made Gandhi the "biggest thing" in this country, he despatched a telegram to Wardha and the old man had come at once

It was a week after, however, on September 11, that the Viceroy addressed, with due ceremony, a joint session of the two houses of Central Legislature, although the Assembly was in session since August 20. In the course of this address the Viceroy read a message from the King Emperor expressing satisfaction at the response of his Indian subjects, described the ruthless German attack on Poland, Hitler's broken pledges and the principles at stake in the war, announced the acceptance by the Government of India as well as the home Government of the conclusions of the Chatfield committee on Indian defence, appealed for unity, and finally stated that the Government had no choice but to hold in suspense work in connection with preparations for Federation while

retaining Federation as their objective. But nowhere in that speech was there the slightest hint of any intention to take concrete measures either to associate the masses of India with the war for Democracy, or to meet their long-cherished political aspirations

The next step of the Government of India was to get the Central Assembly, from which Congress members had kept away, to pass the Defence of India Bill, which had already been issued as an Ordinance. This was done on August 20. On the 29th the Viceroy opened a War Purposes Fund to receive the spontaneous and very generous donations of the Princes and people of India for purposes connected with the war.

Meanwhile the Congress Working Committee had passed its famous resolution demanding a declaration of war aims and agitation from other parties too was slowly growing. To meet this agitation the Viceroy once again sent for Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji met the Viceroy on September 26 followed the next day by Mr Mahomed Ali Jinnah. At this stage it became known that Babu Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had also been invited to meet the Viceroy on October 3. Public expectation and hope were raised to a high pitch. But slowly they were amazed to find that the Viceroy was taking up week after week to interview a long and interminable procession of 'leaders' from all over India—a 'Talkie-House' of 52 of them in all.

The Viceroy had already built up a reputation for inscrutability. It had become a standing joke in New Delhi that nobody knew His Excellency's mind "except perhaps Mr. (Now Sir Gilbert) Laithwaite", his private secretary, who occupied such a position

on another". After admirably summarising the demands for such changes the Viceroy professed to have discovered that "as matters stand to-day, the constitutional position of India and the policy of His Majesty's Government are governed by the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935" The Viceroy described how Part III of the Act dealing with the Provincial sphere had been working for the preceding two years and a half, and said that the scheme of the Act was essentially sound, and that it transferred great power and great opportunity to popularly elected governments dependent on the support of a majority in their legislatures

*Having given a certificate to the Government of India Act and those who had run the Provincial administrations the Viceroy proceeded to answer questions regarding the "intentions and aims of His Majesty's Government" In answering these questions he referred to the statement made by Sir Samuel Hoare on behalf of the Government in the House of Commons on February 6, 1935, which statement in its turn referred to the preamble to the Government of India Act of 1919 and the interpretation placed on it in 1929 by Lord Irwin, as Viceroy, that the "natural issue of India's progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status"*

(It was in reference to the mention of the declarations of policy made in 1919 and 1929, that Mr B G Kher said in the course of the debate in the Bombay Assembly on the war resolution —"It will, I am sure, be repeated in 1949 and 1959 and 1969, if indeed we are so supine as to await the pleasure of those who are to-day ruling over us in the matter of our progress on the road to self-determination")



The Viceroy, however, gave an assurance that at the end of the war the Government would be very willing "to enter into consultation with representatives of the several communities, parties and interests in India and with the Indian Princes, with a view to securing their aid and co-operation in the framing of such modifications as may seem desirable"

Having thus disposed of the past and the future, the Viceroy turned to the present. What was the Government going to do to meet the immediate demands of the people and requirements of war? A Consultative Group, was the answer—a group "representative of all major political parties in British India and of the Princes, over which the Governor-General would himself preside, which would be summoned at his invitation and which would have as its object the association of public opinion in India with the conduct of the war and with questions relating to war activities"

The statement evoked very little response from any party in the country, but Congress reaction was both definite and immediate. A supporting statement by Lord Zetland, Secretary of State for India, in the House of Lords the next day did not improve matters in any way. It was in the course of this statement that Lord Zetland paid a personal tribute to Mahatma Gandhi "the most outstanding figure on the Indian political stage known to and beloved by the people of India for the readiness which he has shown not only to interpret to us the viewpoint and aspirations of the Congress but to endeavour to appreciate in his turn our viewpoint and the difficulties with which we had to grapple and furthermore, for the help which he has most willingly given us in our endeavours to surmount them"

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But the Mahatma was not dying for boquets to his personal greatness. The only appreciation of the Viceroy's statement he would accord was to remark "The Congress asked for bread and it has got a stone". Feeling sullen and humiliated the Congress decided to withdraw the ministries. By November 8, all the Congress Ministries were out (the ministry of the Central Provinces being the last), and after half-hearted attempts to set up alternative ministries, section 93 of the Government of India Act was invoked and the constitution was suspended, the Governors taking over the administration of the provinces.

This is the genesis of the deadlock, as it has come to be called.

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## 5 THE AMERY TOUCH

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THE most tragic aspect of the situation that thinking India has had to face during this war is that it is in quarrel with its own sentiments. It is easy, too easy, to draw up a tremendous indictment against British rule in India. It is true that the vast masses of India entertain anti-British feelings, due to the ceaseless agitation of the last twenty years, during which the British administration in India has been the chief target of attack. At the same time it is equally true that educated Indians have a soft corner for England—its thought and culture, its record of achievements in science and learning, its patriotism and love of freedom, its tradition of democracy, the enchanting sweep of its literature.

The leaders of the Congress representing the most typical products of English education are not free from this 'weakness' despite their bitter experience with Britain and her ruling class in the political field. Jawaharlal Nehru is known to be more British than Indian. But Mahatma Gandhi is no less pro-British. Was he not once so loyal to the Empire that he wrote to Lord Chelmsford that he longed to have the same loyalty towards the Empire as a Britisher had in his heart? Therefore the Congress has always been reluctant to take any step that seemed to go against the British interests.

It was the same in 1939. While the Congress claimed that the people of India alone had the right to decide if they should join the war, it seems to have been pretty clear in its own mind that given this freedom, the people would unhesitatingly plump for the Allies.

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It was this feeling that led Mr Srikrishna Sinha, the Premier of Bihar, to declare on the floor of the Bihar Assembly, even as he was about to lay down the reins of power that India was only waiting for a gesture from Great Britain and millions would then rush to give their lives in the battlefield to help her in the present war

But no such gesture was forthcoming Long and interminable debates took place in India and in England and endless statements and counter-statements were issued Faced with the prospect of the resignation of the Congress Ministries, Sir Samuel Hoare, in the course of a debate in the House of Commons had vaguely indicated that he wished to close no door for settlement He had also referred to the possibility of introducing "into the Viceroy's Council political leaders who would hold portfolios in certain of the great departments"

Obviously in pursuance of these statements, the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League received invitations to meet the Viceroy, much to the deep satisfaction of everybody And so on November 1, 1939, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Rajendra Prasad and Mr M A Jinnah met the Viceroy together at New Delhi The next day Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad arrived in Delhi and held consultations with Gandhiji and the Congress President Also Gandhiji had another interview with Mr Jinnah

And at the end of it all, the Viceroy broadcast a declaration on November 5 announcing the 'failure' of the talks and released to the press the correspondence he had with the Presidents of the Congress and the Muslim League According to this broadcast the object of the conversations, to put it in the devious language of the Viceroy was, "to bring together the leaders of

the great parties and to endeavour to secure, as a result of personal contact between them, and with what personal assistance I could myself give, that measure of agreement in the Provinces which, in their view, would enable them to put forward proposals for a constructive advance at the centre for the period of the war, such as would be represented by some expansion of the Governor-General's Executive Council and by the inclusion in it of political leaders "

The Congress President in the course of his letter took the view that the crisis was entirely political and was not related to the communal issues in India and Mr Jinnah in his letter said nothing at all

The policy of the Government was once again clearly explained by the Viceroy in a speech in Bombay on January 10, 1940 According to this speech the objective of India was Full Dominion Status the Government were ready to consider the reopening of the scheme of the Act of 1935 after the war and in the meantime they were prepared "subject to such local adjustments between the leaders of the communities as may be necessary to ensure harmonious working and as an immediate earnest of their intention, to expand the Executive Council of the Governor General "

Meanwhile the Congress was slowly drifting towards Civil Disobedience Reluctantly the Congress leaders began to speak of the 'Next Step' Gandhiji had one more interview with the Viceroy on February 5 1940, but this made no difference Therefore the plenary session of the Congress held at Ramgarh adopted a resolution which contained the fateful words "Congressmen and those under the Congress influence, cannot help in the prosecution of the war with men money or material' It was also resolved to follow the first step of withdraw-

ing the Ministries "to enforce the Congress determination to free India from foreign domination" by Civil Disobedience. But the Mahatma still talked of compromise. "Compromise is in my very being" he said, addressing the Subjects Committee at Ramgarh.

The *impasse* continued. New laws and ordinances by decree descended on the country. Congressmen and others were being arrested in ever growing numbers. During and after the Bombay textile strike of March-April, 1940, the Communists were outlawed and practically all of them were detained. Resentment grew, and with it demands for action. Slowly events were moving towards a show down.

But while the Congress hesitated the *blitzkrieg* blazed over Europe. "April came and the Norwegian debacle. May brought the horrors of Holland and Belgium, June the sudden collapse of France and Paris, that proud and fair city, nursery of freedom, lay crushed and fallen" (J N)\*

At the first touch of catastrophe the doddering government of Chamberlain was swept off and a more vigorous ministry came into being with Winston Churchill as Premier. Numerous are the eulogies that have been showered on Churchill. But his character is most admirably summed up in the remark made by Lord Oxford many years ago that "he has genius without judgment." And his genius is essentially a genius of war. It is a fact of history that the men who are best able to wage wars are least fitted for the purposes of peace. The meteoric personality of Churchill is the last from whom India could have expected the solution of her problem. And it was not without significance that Churchill should have chosen as Secretary of State for India, his contemporary at Harrow, Leopold Charles Maurice Stennet Amery.

Born in India of a British father and a Jewish-Hungarian mother and educated at Harrow and Balliol, Mr Amery had long ago acquired a reputation as the most complete expression of British Diehardism. But he is known to be a formidable man—"able, industrious, brave, sincere, with the philosophy of a barbarian, the vision of a heathen world and the sombre frenzy of a dervish of the desert" (A G G)\*

Neither Mr Churchill nor Mr Amery believe in the silken glove that hides the mailed fist. It is true that occasionally they have had to adopt their language to suit the fancies of the more liberal governments, of their Allies, America, Russia and China. But they have not moved a jot from their fundamental stand.

In his very first statement as India Secretary, Mr Amery confirmed what his predecessor had done and significantly remarked that the Government would welcome any settlement "that will take account of the legitimate claims of ALL communities and interests". This statement led Pandit Nehru to say that the content of his utterance had no relation to facts in India or Europe, and Mr C. Rajagopalachari observed that it would be better to await events than to comment on such a statement.

And events were moving fast. The fall of France had a profound and disturbing effect on the members of the Congress Working Committee. Therefore when the Committee met at Wardha on June 17, 1940, they struck a new note altogether. "Deeply moved by the tragic events that have taken place in Europe in startling succession and, in particular by the misfortune that has befallen the people of France" they felt that the "problems which were distant are now near at hand and may soon demand solution. The problem of the achievement of National Freedom has now to be

## FREEDOM FIRST

considered along with the allied one of its maintenance and the defence of the country against possible external aggression and internal disorder ”

This meeting of the Working Committee at Wardha is also a notable landmark in the Congress thought in another direction. It is well-known that under Gandhiji's leadership the Congress had adhered to the principle of Non-violence in its struggle for Freedom. But the developments of the war profoundly disturbed men's minds and posed new questions before them. Gandhiji, after an initial period of what seemed like doubting had come to rely more and more on Non-violence. In fact he had been urging the Congress Working Committee to extend the principle of Non-violence to the functioning of a free state. Some members of the Committee on the other hand, far from agreeing to commit the future free India to a policy of Non-violence in the discharge of its primary functions of protecting it against external aggression and internal disorders felt that they could not hug to Non-violence even in the immediate matter of National Defence. “Gandhiji felt, and probably rightly, that he could not give up or tone down a message which he had for the world. He must have freedom to give it as he liked and not be kept back by political exigencies. So, for the first time, he went one way and the Congress Working Committee another ” (J N )

This decision of the Committee was embodied in a statement which has now become famous as the Wardha Statement. The result of this decision was that it left the Working Committee to move and work on the plane of politics and paved the way for what is called the Poona Offer.

This offer was made to the British Government at the instance of Mr C. Rajagopalachari. Although



Mr C Rajagopalachari was known to belong to the right wing of the Congress and was a close follower and friend of Mahatma Gandhi, his 'brilliant intellect, selfless character and penetrating powers of analysis' (J N.) had led him to hoist the standard of revolt. He had given a hint of the working of his mind, when, presiding over the Tinnevely District Political Conference at Ambasamudram on June 9, he said "I consider it our duty, however unpleasant and unreasonable it may appear on the surface to reiterate with all the force we can command, our claim that Britain should at this supreme hour of her difficulty declare India once and for all free and independent, and then India should declare herself a new-born ally on the side of England and France"

Therefore when the Wardha Decision left the Working Committee of the Congress free to take political decisions, without having to think of their implications in terms of violence and Non-violence Mr Rajagopalachari found it possible to induce the Committee to put forward a proposal for the acknowledgement of India's independence by Britain and the immediate formation at the Centre of a Provisional National Government which would be responsible to the Central Assembly. The Government thus formed would take charge of defence and help in the war-effort. The point about the offer was that the Congress would abandon its theoretical claim for Independence here and now, and would be satisfied merely with an acknowledgement of India's right to independence ultimately. To meet *the national emergency it would agree to join the Government even without any constitutional alterations with the sole object of mobilising the entire resources of the country for war.* These are the lowest and the most concrete terms for co operation the Congress has ever offered during this war.

About the time that the Working Committee issued its statement from Wardha fresh appeals were being made on all sides for a solution of the Indian deadlock. Once more the Viceroy sent for Mahatma Gandhi and had a long talk with him at Simla on June 30. It was a meeting between the immovable and the inexorable. The Viceroy does not appear to have made any new offer, but rather intimated his intention of proceeding with his plans ignoring the Congress attitude. And two days after his interview with the Viceroy, Gandhi issued his famous appeal to every Briton "to accept the method of Non-violence instead of that of war for the adjustment of relations between nations" and appealed for a cessation of hostilities "not because you are too exhausted to fight but because war is bad in essence."

But when the Congress Working Committee met at Delhi the day after, it was not Gandhi's voice but that of Mr. Rajagopalachari which prevailed. It was not easy for the Committee to arrive at a decision. On the eve of its meeting, Subhas Chandra Bose had been arrested. While the Committee sat Mr. M. S. Aney arrived from Simla after interviewing the Viceroy. It was reputed at that time he had brought a letter from the Viceroy. About the same time Mr. V. D. Savarkar also interviewed the Viceroy while the Congress President held consultations with Mr. Fazlul Huq and the late Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan.

In this setting the Committee discussed the situation for five days, an average of six hours every day, and at last hesitatingly adopted a draft resolution put forward by Mr. C. Rajagopalachari. The circumstances attending the resolution were later described by Gandhi in a statement. Referring to Mr. Rajagopalachari he said "he was as certain of his position as I was of mine. His persistency, courage and utter humility brought him converts. Sardar Patel was his

greatest prize He will not allow me to say that his was a departure from *Ahimsa* He claims that his very *Ahimsa* has led him to a point which culminated in his resolution He thinks that I suffer from obsession owing to too much brooding on *Ahimsa* He almost thinks that my vision is blurred It was no use my returning the compliment though half-jokingly, I did "

Later in the course of the statement Gandhiji said "Rajaji's resolution represents the considered policy of the Congress Non congressmen who were eager for the Congress to be free of my religious bias to adopt a purely political attitude should welcome the resolution and support it wholeheartedly So should the Muslim League and even the Princes who think of India more than their principalities "

Two points arising out of the Delhi resolution were authoritatively explained by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad In answer to criticisms made by Mr M A Jinnah the Congress President telegraphed to Mr Jinnah on July 12 that the expression 'National Government' in the Delhi resolution definitely meant a "composite cabinet not limited to a single party " In answer to another criticism that the resolution only expressed readiness to defend India and not to participate in the war, the President stated in an interview at Nainital on July 11 that if India's demand was granted it would be her duty to participate in the war He emphatically asserted that the resolution had no other meaning in the minds of a single individual member of the Congress Working Committee

This open offer of co operation with the Government unloosed a storm of criticism on the Working Committee from all sides The Mahatma was so upset that he did not attend the next meeting of the Committee at Poona followed by a meeting of the All India Congress

Committee (July 25-28) The Leftists were up in arms They greeted the resolution as a surrender, and to the official motion seeking confirmation of the Delhi resolution they moved seven different amendments Three of these were pressed to a division and lost The official resolution was carried by 95 votes against 47, which cannot be called a very big majority Many people including Pandit Nehru and Babu Rajendra Prasad were in doubt and remained neutral

It was now for the British Government to make their choice as Gandhiji said 'Independence they cannot withhold unless their wisdom is as much blurred as Rajaji claims that mine is If independence is recognised the acceptance of the other part of the resolution follows as a matter of course The question is do they want to impress help from India by virtue of their rulership over India or will they have the help that free and independent India can give ?'

But there was none to answer that question On the contrary the Viceroy, obviously in close consultation with the Home Government prepared one of his periodical statements This was the famous declaration of August 8

Considering the extraordinary 'patience' which the Viceroy had displayed in seeing India's political leaders on earlier occasions and bearing in mind the fact that the Congress had just made an important offer, the manner in which the Viceroy made his declaration is really curious Instead of calling the leaders and discussing with them as before, he sent to them advance copies of his declaration embodying decisions already arrived at without consulting them, told them that he would make the declaration on a given date and asked them to meet him thereafter to discuss details about the implementation of the policy announced by him,

knowing perhaps, fully well, that the Congress at any rate would not even approve of the policy underlying the declaration

This would go to show that Mahatma Gandhi judged him correctly when he wrote of him thus "He listens to your argument with a patience and attention I have never known any other Viceroy or high functionary to show in an equal measure He is never ruffled and discourteous With all this, however, he is not to be easily moved from his position He meets you with his decision on the matter under discussion already made He takes care not to let you think that it is so, but there is no doubt about it that his decision is unchangeable He is not receptive He has amazing confidence in the correctness of his judgment He does not believe in a gentleman's or any other agreement "

The Viceregal declaration which was published on August 8 as predetermined recapitulated the declaration of His Majesty's Government made the previous October and the attempts made by the Viceroy to bring together the various parties It placed on record the fact that the differences which had prevented the achievement of National Unity remained unbridged

But the expansion of the Viceroy's Council could no longer be postponed on that account The Viceroy, therefore announced that the British Government had authorised him to invite "a certain number of representative Indians" to join his Executive Council He had also been authorised to establish a War Advisory Council, which would contain "representatives of the Indian States, and of other interests in the national life of India as a whole"

As for the future the Viceroy dealt with two special points First, he gave an assurance that the Government were concerned to see that "full weight should

be given to the views of the Minorities in any revision" of the constitution. He went even further and said "It goes without saying that they could not contemplate the transfer of present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any *system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life*. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government."

After having thus definitely assured the veto to any party or section of the people who could be brought under the term 'large and powerful elements' the Viceroy announced that His Majesty's Government were in sympathy with the desire that the framing of the future scheme of an Indian Government should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves. The Government were prepared to help India to satisfy her desire in this respect subject to two conditions

First "subject to the due fulfilment of the obligations which Great Britain's long connection with India has imposed upon her and for which His Majesty's Government cannot divest themselves of responsibility"

Secondly, subject to the fact that "a moment when the Commonwealth is engaged in a struggle for existence is not one in which fundamental constitutional issues can be decisively resolved"

The Congress rejection of the Viceroy's invitation to join the Executive Council was of course, a forgone conclusion. After a brief interchange of telegrams during which the Viceroy intimated the Congress President that the discussions following the declaration were to be confined to the terms of the declaration itself the latter decided that no useful purpose would be served by his seeing the Viceroy.

The Congress offer had thus been unceremoniously turned down. An uneasy dissatisfaction was the keynote of Nationalist feeling. The speech that Secretary of State Amery chose to make, initiating a debate on India in the House of Commons on August 14, was calculated to convert uneasiness into amazement.

Two small extracts from this speech deserve to be specially noted. Mr Amery categorically asserted "India cannot be unitary in the sense that we are in this island, but she can still be unity. *India's future house of freedom has room for many mansions*."

After expatiating at length on the attitude of the different elements in India to the constitutional problem, Mr Amery referred to the Congress demand and said "It is a demand which really raises the whole unresolved constitutional issue and prejudices it in the sense favoured by the Congress and rejected by the Minorities."

The developments in India which gave Mr Amery the courage and the justification to make these significantly sinister statements will be narrated in the next chapter.

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\* J. N.—Additional Chapter to the American edition of his Autobiography by Jawaharlal Nehru

A. G. G.—A. G. Gardner. Certain people of importance

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## 6 THE THREE CARD TRICK

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**I**F politics is a game of achieving your ends by the easiest possible means, Mr. Mohomed Ali Jinnah is certainly a brilliant player. Of the galaxy of men and women who are the accredited leaders of India's millions, he is perhaps the cleverest, the most astute and clear-headed, if narrow-visioned politician. It was his ability as a strategist that was responsible for transforming the Muslim League from a somewhat ghostly existence into a formidable organisation.

From 1924 to 1936, when under Mr Jinnah's inspiration, the Muslim League decided to contest the ensuing elections to the Provincial Assemblies, the League counted for little in Indian public life. Even after a Parliamentary Board was set up, the position of the League was very weak. The Unionist party of the Punjab, under the leadership of Sir Fazle Hussain, refused to accept the League colours. Mr Fazlul Huq of Bengal was still a congressman. Maulana Jafar Ali Khan and the *Ittihad-e millat* had adopted an irreconcilable attitude. Soon enough other men like Nawab Yusuf, the Nawab of Chattarai, Mr Syed Abdul Aziz of Bihar and even Sir Abdulla Haroon had resigned from the League. The result was that the League candidates fared pretty badly in the Provincial Elections. Out of 485 reserved Muslim seats, the League secured only 108. There was not a single League member in the Assemblies of Bihar, Central Provinces, North-west Frontier, Orissa and Sind.

Mr Jinnah was not slow to realise what was needed to remedy the amorphousness and inanition of the League and transform it into a robust and popular



organisation In close imitation of the Congress, the Muslim League at its annual session held at Lucknow in October 1937 not only adopted Independence as its objective but accepted a social and economic programme designed to have a mass appeal It is curious to note that this programme among other items, lays stress on rural uplift work, the encouragement of cottage industries and small indigenous industries, the use of Swadeshi articles, the enforcement of prohibition and the devising of measure for the attainment of full Independence

It was at this session that, Sir Fazle Hussain having in the meanwhile passed away, Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan and his followers "descended like parachutists" and formed a pact with Mr Jinnah The hands of Mr Jinnah were thus strengthened

Mr Jinnah's political methods may be irritating but they are effective for the purposes he has in view It is well known how he kept the Congress at bay by insisting on the Congress avowing itself a Hindu organisation and admitting the League to be the sole representative organisation of the Muslims This was a clever move to get the Congress to insult and fight two groups of Muslims outside the League—those Muslims in the Congress and those others who belonged to neither The Congress Muslims would have been badly let down if the Congress avowed itself a Hindu organisation, and all Muslims outside the League would have been insulted if the League was recognised as the 'sole' representative organisation of Indian Muslims

When after the outbreak of the war the Congress President, Dr Rajendra Prasad asked Mr Jinnah to join the deliberations of the Congress Working Com-

mittee, he refused on the plea of unsuitability of time and place. When later the Congress President offered to have certain allegations made by him against the Congress regimes investigated, Mr Jinnah refused the offer on the ground that he had referred the matter to the Viceroy who was the proper authority. When everybody was deploring the suspension of the Constitution due to the resignation of Congress Ministries, Mr Jinnah defiantly called for the observance of the "Deliverance Day". When the Viceroy held joint consultations with himself and the Congress leaders, he allowed the Congress leaders to announce the breakdown without himself assigning any reason for it. After the Delhi offer of the Congress Mr Jinnah repelled the approaches of the Congress President by pouring irrelevant abuse on him. He varied the method and killed Mr C Rajagopalachari's "sporting offer" to accept Mr Jinnah as the first Premier of India by completely ignoring it.

It is notable that Mr Jinnah has maintained the position of the League almost exclusively by his skill as a strategist, as much during the war, as before it.

While the Congress and other parties had clearly defined, each its respective stand even before the war, the League was the only organisation which made itself conspicuous by its refusal to commit itself one way or other. On August 27, 1939—before the outbreak of the war—the Council of the All India Muslim League met at New Delhi and adopted a resolution which *inter alia* stated that it was premature to determine the attitude of the Moslems in the event of a world war breaking out. The resolution while authorising the Working Committee to decide the issue in a sudden contingency, directed the Committee to ascertain the views of other Islamic countries.

A week later war was declared. The League Working Committee met at New Delhi on September 18 and adopted a lengthy resolution expressing deep sympathy for Poland, Britain and France and then proceeded to say that "real and solid Muslim co-operation and support to Great Britain in this hour of her trial cannot be secured successfully, if His Majesty's Government and the Viceroy are unable to secure to the Mussalmans justice and fairplay in the Congress-governed provinces," by the use of special powers vested in the Governors. The Committee entered a *caveat* against the Governors for allowing their special powers "expressly embodied in the statute" to remain "dormant and absolete."

(This openly expressed desire that the Governors should have used and should use their special powers throws some light on a later controversy. At the last meeting of the A I C C on August 7, 1942 Pandit Nehru stated that he had been informed that at the time of the Cripps' negotiations the spokesmen of the League had insisted that the Viceroy's veto and special powers should not be abrogated in any new constitution. But this was indignantly denied by Mr Jinnah.)

As far as the constitutional aspect of the matter was concerned, the Committee while appreciating the suspension of the Federation, wished that it had been abandoned completely and also expressed its irrevocable opposition to the "Federal objective" of the Government. The Committee did not ask for any positive gift or boon but only demanded an "assurance that no declaration regarding the question of constitutional advance for India should be made without the consent and approval of the All-India Muslim League nor any constitution be framed and finally adopted by His Majesty's Government and the British Parliament without such consent and approval."

The next major move of Mr Jinnah was to fling into this already troubled world of politics, the haunting distracting, magic word—'PAKISTAN' Pakistan was not exactly a new conception. But so far it had only been a poet's dream and certainly Mr Jinnah was not known to be one of its ardent supporters. Even after Mr Jinnah had propounded his two nation theory, he does not seem to have thought in terms of partition. This view is supported by the following conversation between himself and Edward Thompson reported by the latter

'Two nations Mr Jinnah, Confronting each other in every province? every village? "

'Two nations, confronting each other in every province, every town, every village. That is the only solution "

"That is a very terrible solution Mr Jinnah "

'It is a terrible solution, but the only one" (ET)

The view that Mr Jinnah was a late convert to the partition idea is also borne out by the article he wrote in the "Time and Tide" as late as February 1940 in the course of which he demanded that a constitution must be evolved that recognized the existence of two nations

in India both of whom must share the governance of their common motherland

It was at the twenty-seventh annual session of the All-India Muslim League held at Lahore on March 22, 23 and 24, 1940 that the famous resolution on what is now popularly called 'Pakistan' was adopted. This session, as Mr Jinnah claimed "will in many ways be a landmark in the future history of the Mussalmans of India"

The resolution endorsed the action taken so far by the Working Committee and the Council of the League, recorded the view that the Viceroy's declaration of October 18, 1939, was reassuring and urged that the whole constitutional plan should be reconsidered *de novo* and proceeded thus —

"It is the considered view of this session of the All Indian Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle viz, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and the Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign"

The resolution further stated that effective and mandatory safeguards should be provided for Minorities in the new units and also authorised the Working Committee to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with the principle laid down by the resolution

Among those who supported the resolution was Dr Mohammed Alam, who had previously resigned from the Congress. He related how before joining the

League, he met Mr Jinnah at Delhi and enquired what sacrifice the Muslim League would be prepared to make to achieve the programme outlined in the resolution. Mr Jinnah assured Dr Alam that he would give his life if necessary. Then Dr Alam enquired if he would go to jail and Mr Jinnah replied "Before you, you will follow me."

Nothing so cataclysmic has, however, happened so far, although Mr Jinnah has since reiterated his demand for a declaration of the Muslim's right to Pakistan "here and now."

Since the resolution was passed, a spate of emotions and passions have been released. But even those British advocates who might have found it profitable at one time to encourage Mr Jinnah to pursue this ideal, long before it crystallised have had to cry halt. Edward Thompson records that in the autumn of 1939 he found "that certain official circles were keen on the Pakistan idea." If his testimony is correct, the idea was simmering in official brains a good six months before the Lahore session of the League.

But now the tune has changed. Listen to what the "Civil and Military Gazette" of Lahore, a British paper, said in an editorial on November 11, 1942:

Seldom has so empty and dangerous a scheme as Pakistan been foisted on a people and so readily accepted. Perhaps only in India could the attempt so ingeniously planned have succeeded. Mr Jinnah has again proved himself the supreme politician. He knew that the reaction to Pakistan would be Akhand Hindustan, he knew that non-Muslim opposition was sufficient to guarantee the Muslim acceptance. And all has gone according to plan. Thinking Muslims dread the implementation of a plan which would link eternally deficit provinces in a debtors federation and which would deprive India's martial races in the North-west of the considerable sums they receive annually in pay and pensions. But they dare not say so.

because they would be spat upon as outcasts. They would, by their own people, be classed with those non-Muslims who have condemned Pakistan for their own very different reasons. And the Muslim Press is in a similar plight. It dare not tell the truth in regard to Pakistan. Press and public leaders have been defeated by a slogan."

And it may be added that while once, Secretary of State Amery found it worth while to encourage such a slogan by talking of the many mansions in India's future House of Freedom, later on he coined the slogan "India first" and the Viceroy has recently thought fit to pointedly stress the geographical unity of India!

After which, it is a purely minor point to note that *Sher-e-Bengal*, Fazlul Huq who sponsored the Pakistan resolution at Lahore is no longer a member of the League!

While the controversy over Pakistan raged, Mr Jinnah was negotiating with the Viceroy. At one time he almost seemed to have achieved something substantial but it turned out to be a mere shadow. The pivot and centre of these negotiations is a valuable document, a memorandum entitled "Tentative Proposals" which was submitted by Mr Jinnah to the Viceroy on June 1, 1940.

The Memorandum itself and a number of letters which passed between Mr Jinnah and the Viceroy, dating from February 6 to September 26 1940 came to be published after the Muslim League refused to have anything to do with the scheme of expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council, envisaged in the August Declaration on the ground that it did not give any "real and substantial share in the authority of the Government at the Centre"

Incidentally it may be noted that Mr Jinnah's pursuit of an interim settlement started even before the

Lahore session of the League and continued long after it.

It may also be noted that it was while Mr Jinnah was right in the midst of his negotiations with the Viceroy that he repelled in a cavalier fashion the attempt made by the Congress for a *rapprochement* with him. Perhaps in the belief that the Government would really satisfy his demands, he handled the Congress rather roughly when the Premiers of the Punjab and Bengal met Maulana Azad on July 7, after the Congress Working Committee had offered to co operate in defence, if a "National Government" were set up. Mr Jinnah announced that the two premiers had no authority to discuss or come to an adjustment over the heads of the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League.

He then stated that the word "National" had been flagrantly abused in the Congress resolution. That led Maulana Azad, the Congress President, to wire to Mr Jinnah informing him that by using that word, the Congress had really meant a composite cabinet. Mr Jinnah's answer was a long and abusive telegram, copies of which were simultaneously handed over to the press refusing to discuss or correspond with Maulana Azad, calling him a show boy of the Congress and asking him to resign.

This was something in the nature of a three card trick played on the press and the public, as the subsequent torrent of condemnation showed. But the result was that public attention was completely distracted from the simple fact that Mr Jinnah did not want any negotiations with the Congress as he was already in touch with other quarters.

Let us now examine this phase in the history of the Muslim League. In a letter dated February 24, 1940,



Mr. Jinnah referred to an earlier statement made by the Viceroy to the effect that "His Majesty's Government are not under any misapprehension as to the importance of the contentment of the Muslim Community to the stability and success of any constitutional development in India. You need, therefore, have no fear that the weight which your community's position in India necessarily gives their views, will be underrated" Mr. Jinnah notified that this was not enough because it left the "position of the ninety million Mussalmans in India only in the region of consultation and counsel," whereas what they wanted was that "no declaration should, either in principle or otherwise, be made or any constitution be enforced without the approval and consent of the Mussalmans of India"

The Working Committee of the League met at Bombay on June 15 and 16, 1940 It felt constrained to state that the proposals for the defence of India made so far, fell far short of the requirements of the situation and authorised its president to enter into communication with the Viceroy Mr Jinnah met the Viceroy on June 27 After the interview in compliance with His Excellency's wishes to let him have any details which he might have in mind, Mr Jinnah submitted a note entitled "Tentative Proposals"—a document which the Viceroy was pleased to certify as a "very clear and valuable memorandum"

In this memorandum Mr Jinnah suggested "that His Majesty's Government must give a definite and categorical assurance to the Mussalmans of India that no interim or final scheme of constitution would be adopted by the British Government without the previous approval of Muslim India"

Compare this with the language of the assurance contained in the subsequent Viceroy's declaration

made on August 7. "It goes without saying that they (His Majesty's Government) could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life"

Dealing with the provisional arrangement, Mr Jinnah had said "That the Executive Council of the Viceroy should be enlarged, within the framework of the present constitutional existing law"

Here is the comment on it the Viceroy made in the course of his declaration "It is clear that the moment when the Commonwealth is engaged in a struggle for existence is not one in which fundamental constitutional issues can be decisively resolved"

It is significant to note that the declaration made on August 7, not only conceded some of the points of a general nature raised in the note submitted by Mr Jinnah but seemed to follow closely the thought and the language of the Memorandum

No wonder the Leagues were jubilant Referring to the Viceroy's declaration, Mr Noman states that "It substantially incorporated the suggestion made by Mr Jinnah with regard to the Viceroy's Council and the creation of a War Advisory Council" Further, he says that the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League "considered the proposals which were on the very lines suggested by the League itself and appreciated the offer in principle" (M N)\*

But only in principle Mr Jinnah was too wary to yield to nothing more concrete than mere verbal conceding of principles He hesitated to commit the League In his 'Tentative proposals' he had laid down

conditions which would give the League representation in the Executive Council equal to that of the Hindus if the Congress came in and would leave them as a majority otherwise and also conditions designed to give the Muslims a voice in the administration of the Provinces. These points had not been touched by the Viceroy.

Therefore the Working Committee of the League which met in Bombay from August 31 to September 2 found that the specific offer to give effect and implement the Viceroy's declaration was most unsatisfactory and did not meet the requirements of the League. The Committee, therefore, authorised its President to seek further information and clarification.

And when that was done, Mr Jinnah much to his chagrin, discovered that it was one thing for the Government to give him verbal support and let him triumph against the Congress but quite another to give him the power which they would not give to the Congress. And so the League Working Committee on September 28 adopted a resolution, which was confirmed the next day by the League Council, regretting their inability to accept the offer made by the Viceroy.

And when later the scheme of expansion of the Viceroy's Council was actually put into effect Mr Jinnah was to find it a challenge to the solidarity of the League and denounce it as the greatest folly.

Once bitten, twice shy, and Mr Jinnah has since chosen to remain on the comfortable but unapproachable heights of Pakistan and not essayed into any practical attempts at a settlement.

One result of the intransigent negativism of Mr Jinnah was the coming together on a common platform of all

progressive Muslims who did not subscribe to the goal of Pakistan. This platform was the Azad (independent) Muslim Conference which held its first session from April 27, 1940. The Conference was invited jointly on behalf of the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema*, the All-India Organisation of Muslim divines and scholars, The *Majlis-I-Ahrar-i-Islam*, the Independent party of Bihar, The Krishak Proja Party of Bengal, the All-India Muslim Conference, the *Anjuman-e-Watan* of Baluchistan and the Central Standing Committee of the All-India Shia Conference. The Conference had also the unofficial blessing of the Congress Muslims, some of whom including Mr Asaf Ali, a member of the Congress Working Committee, attended it.

The late Mr Allah Baksh who presided over the Conference pointed out that the "Pakistan Scheme is the most indiscreet approach to a serious problem and as such has torpedoed the very basis of a reasonable settlement."

Following his lead the Conference resolved that "India with its geographical and political boundaries, is an indivisible whole, and as such it is the common homeland of all the citizens, irrespective of race or religion, who are joint owners of its resources." The Conference also resolved that Independence should be the goal of India, favoured the idea of a Constituent Assembly for framing the future constitution of India, suggested that Indian Muslims should adopt a neutral attitude in the matter of the war and should fully participate in the struggle for Freedom.

The Conference also set up a Board with the objects of preaching communal unity, devising means for the permanent solution of the communal problem and drawing up a future constitution of India. Following this first mobilisation of forces the Nationalist Muslims

have been doing their bit to maintain a spirit of balance and harmony in Indian politics. The underlying ideas of the Conference were also propagated through several other Conferences such as the Bihar Political Muslim Conference held at Sohanala on July 22, 1940 under the chairmanship of Mr S A Brelvi, the U P Azad Muslim Conference held at Lucknow about the same time under the presidentship of Maulvi Abdul Majid, the Anti Communal Conference held at Lahore on March 9, 1941 under the chairmanship of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and the South Indian Anti Separation Conference held at Kumbakonam on June 8 1941 under the chairmanship of Mr M Y Sharief.

These Conferences and the men behind them representing the nationalist Muslim opinion may yet emerge as Mr Allah Baksh said as the one ' golden bridge which leads not merely to communal harmony in the country but to the ultimate goal namely Indian Independence '.

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\* M N      Muslim India      by      Mahomed Noman

**W**HILE the Congress and the Muslim League are admittedly important, no impartial and non-partisan observer can ignore the existence of other parties and individuals or fail to record their opinions and doings. The most important of such parties is the Hindu Mahasabha. Starting more as an organisation for social reform than as a political party the Mahasabha has had a somewhat chequered history, and curious policies. The Congress with its wider nationalistic appeal having drawn the masses into its fold, it was only when some such issue as the Communal Award—the Congress opposition to which was doubtful if not dubious—has agitated the public mind that the Mahasabha has obtained a hearing as an exponent of the doubts and fears of the Hindus. In recent years, however, the Mahasabha has tended to gather weight as a counterpoise to the Muslim League.

In 1937 Mr V D Savarkar was freed from his detention at Ratnagiri and was at once elected to preside over the annual session of the Mahasabha at Ahmedabad. Since then he has thrown the entire weight of his rugged and forceful personality to revitalise and organise the Hindu Mahasabha.

The war time policy of the British government has brought the Mahasabha into the limelight. The Mahasabha itself seems to have been so agreeably surprised at the "recognition" it secured that the main resolution on the political situation adopted at the plenary session of the Mahasabha held at Madura in December 1940 "appreciated the recognition by the Viceroy

and the Secretary of State that the political situation in the country could not be satisfactorily solved without the co-operation of the Hindu Mahasabha" But it would seem that the Mahasabha's politics, except on certain specific issues like Pakistan, have so far been pathetically out of tune with the spirit of the times

It has not spoken with a firm and single voice even in the matter of its goal In 1937, the Mahasabha declared Complete Independence to be its goal After the war was declared it stated that while it stuck to Complete Independence as the ultimate goal, it would be satisfied if a constitution based on Dominion Status were conferred on India immediately The resolution passed by the Working Committee of the Mahasabha on November 19, 1939, and later confirmed at the Annual Session demanded the establishment of a "responsible government" at the Centre Various resolutions of the Mahasabha have asked for Dominion Status "immediately", "at the end of the war" and "one year after the war"

The war policy of the Mahasabha has had no relation to its political objective, nor is it related to any high and mighty principle such as anti-Fascism According to Mr G V Ketkar, Editor, "Maharatta", and Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha, "the Hindu Mahasabha does not look at the war efforts from a moral basis and does not on that basis take sides in the European war" In fact a resolution passed by the Working Committee of the Mahasabha as early as September 10, 1939, declared that it did not believe in the claims of any Power among the belligerent nations that it has been actuated "solely by moral and altruistic considerations" Therefore

when Mr Churchill refused to include India in the countries to which the Atlantic Charter was to be applied the Mahasabha was able to gloat over its own pre-vision. A resolution adopted by its Working Committee (New Delhi, October 11, 12, 1941) noted Mr Churchill's "blunt confession" and said that it "will disillusion those Indians, Congressites and others, who fancied at the very outbreak of the war that Britain was out in defence of Democracy and Freedom all over the world and does vindicate the unerring view the Hindu Mahasabha took which has declared again and again ever since the breaking out of the war that every one of the belligerents including even Russia and America was out for self-interest and *self-aggrandizement* alone. India too must consequently adopt that policy alone which safeguards and promotes her own National Interests"

And for the Mahasabha, India's "National interests" are synonymous with the interests of the Hindus of India. And it conceives that the interests of the Hindus are best served by their militarisation and industrialisation. That is why Mr Savarkar, the energetic president of the Mahasabha has coined the harsh but accurate slogan—"Hinduise politics and militarise Hindudom". It must be added that the Mahasabha feels that it can achieve its objects by offering "responsive co-operation" in the war effort. It has therefore, kept on urging the Hindus to offer themselves for recruitment in the fighting services, even when it has felt that the "response" to its "co-operation" has not been satisfactory.

If you add to the foregoing the repeated calls made by the Mahasabha first, against any tendency to recognise the Congress as really representing the



Hindus, and second, against any tendency to accede to the "arrogant" demands of Mr. Jinnah, the whole gamut of its policies and activities will have been covered.

It was from the point of view of militarisation that the Mahasabha supported the scheme of Expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council, subject to certain conditions. These conditions were set out in a series of resolutions adopted by the Working Committee at a meeting held in Bombay from September 21 to 23, 1939. They were that the Government should accord Dominion Status to India one year after the war, the Viceroy should declare that the Government had not approved of Pakistan, the Viceroy should not entertain the Muslim claim for 50 per cent representation in the legislatures and services, and that the Mahasabha should get six seats on the Executive Council, if the Muslim League got two.

But the Mahasabha was soon to be disillusioned. The Congress having rejected and condemned the Viceroy's proposals was fast drifting towards Civil Disobedience. The Muslim League also refused the Viceroy's offer. Therefore when the Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha met again at Delhi on October 12 and 13, 1940, it had no hesitation in declaring that the proposals had failed to give any satisfaction to the "progressive political parties in the country" because it held out "neither any tangible and definite promise of the inauguration of the Dominion Government immediately at the end of the war, nor the introduction of the element of responsibility in any form in the present Central Government immediately." The Committee also condemned the assurances given to the minorities in the statements

of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, expressed satisfaction at the firm stand taken by the Viceroy in dealing with the "extravagant and arrogant" demands of Mr Jinnah, condemned the Congress for failing to take a realistic view of the political situation, and expressed the devout hope that the Viceroy would soon come out with a more liberal scheme of reform

That brings the story as far as we have taken it in earlier chapters. But in the case of the Hindu Mahasabha it would be convenient to notice here, its activities till a much later date

The Twenty-second Annual session of the Mahasabha was held at Madura (December 28 to 30, 1940). The Congress movement of Civil Disobedience was proceeding apace and India's jails were slowly filling up. The Pakistan demand of the Muslim League had set the country by the ears and the Government had found it comfortable to encourage the baby's growth. The emotions of the Hindu Mahasabha members were being stirred. Therefore the Mahasabha was egged on to take a somewhat threatening attitude.

The main resolution adopted at Madura considered that the declarations made from time to time by the Viceroy and the Secretary of State on the constitutional question were 'Vague, inadequate and unsatisfactory', called for a declaration that Dominion Status as contemplated in the Statute of Westminster shall be conferred on India within a year after the war, and that the constitution shall be so framed as to ensure the integrity and indivisibility of India as a state and a nation. It condemned "the attitude of the British Government in not making a clear announcement of its opposition to the scheme of Pakistan, and "urged

the Government to declare immediately that Pakistan will not be tolerated and entertained "

The resolution ended on a threatening note. "In case the Government fails to make a satisfactory response to the demands embodied in the resolution before March 31, 1941, the Mahasabha will start a movement of direct action" A committee was also appointed "for devising ways and means for starting and conducting the same immediately after the lapse of the said period "

But nothing was heard of the "threat" till the meeting of the Working Committee at Calcutta on June 14, 1941 although the Committee had met three times during that period At this meeting, however, a resolution was adopted "postponing" the question a launching the campaign of direct action on an All-India issue and scale The long resolution containing this decision was confirmed by the All-India Committee of the Mahasabha the next day The resolution stated that in the course of his reply to Mr Savarkar the Viceroy made it clear that the "proclaimed and accepted" goal of the British Parliament was to lead India to Dominion Status and that he had assured that the Governors of various provinces were determined to use their full powers to protect one community against another The Committee after noting the various pronouncements of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State regarding Pakistan, opined that their replies regarding the demands of the Mahasabha were "evasive, unsatisfactory and disappointing" In spite of this the resolution decided to postpone direct action because of the national and international situation, "particularly in view of the widespread and organised aggression on the Hindus "

During the months preceding this decision a series of communal riots had taken place in Dacca Ahmedabad, Bombay, Sind, Cawnpore, Bihar Sharifa and other places. The Mahasabha spokesmen alleged that these riots were a concerted move on the part of the Muslims to enforce the Pakistan demand. The need to organise themselves against such attacks was the reason professed by the Mahasabha when, in the words of Mr Savarkar, they were advised to postpone "any foolish jail-seeking programme, taking a lesson from the Congress fiasco of their own programme."

Hardly a few months elapsed after the 'threat' was vacated when the Mahasabha came into conflict with the Bihar government over the question of the time and venue of the annual session to be held at Bhagalpur. The Government banned the meeting on the ground of its proximity to certain Muslim religious days. This was resented by the Mahasabha and it resolved to enforce its decision by offering Civil resistance.

Once again the Mahasabha hit the headlines. Dramatic scenes were witnessed for four days from December 23 to 26 1941. Most of the Mahasabha leaders including Mr Savarkar, Dr B S Moonje, Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherji and more than a thousand volunteers were arrested. The sessions were technically 'held' in defiance of police orders and several meetings and processions were dispersed by force.

Feelings ran high. Sir Manmathnath Mukherjee interviewed the Viceroy only to be told that there was no ground for interfering in a matter which "was essentially a provincial one." Mahatma Gandhi urged the Bihar Government to lift the ban, Mr.

M R Jayakar appealed to the Viceroy to intervene ; the All-India Liberal Federation adopted a resolution condemning the ban, the Rt Hon Srinivasa Sastry felt that "bent and broken as he was in age, his sluggish blood ran somewhat swiftly" as he moved the resolution of condemnation, newspapers were loud in their protests against the ban and eloquent in their admiration of the Mahasabha

But it turned out that they were all backing the wrong horse, for, on December 27, Mr G V Ketkar called off Civil Resistance according to instructions given by Mr Savarkar seventeen days earlier, on December 10'

Nor did all this make any difference to the fundamental policies of the Mahasabha This was made clear by the President in his undelivered Bhagalpur address He reiterated that the war was an opportunity which must be used for the "militarization and industrialisation of our Hindu Nation" and exhorted the "Hindu people to join the army, navy, the aerial forces and the different war industries"

IN marked contrast to the Congress the League and the Mahasabha, the National Liberal Federation claims not to represent the impulse of the masses but the mature wisdom of a few elder politicians It has for a long time been the platform of Indian moderate leaders, whose opinion is supposed to have a great influence on the rulers of India

This group of political 'leaders' have had two fixed principles in their life First, they want Dominion Status within the Empire, and not Independence Secondly, they are opposed to direct action of any

kind and are inseparably wedded to constitutional forms of agitation

As far as the war is concerned, they have never been slow to denounce any move or attempt which they deemed would hamper the war effort. At the same time their political demands have been analogous if not identical with those of the Congress. But they have scouted the methods of the Congress in enforcing its demands.

After the August Declaration of the Viceroy, the Council of the Federation met and naively asked that the declaration "should be clarified and modified" in half-a-dozen different ways. Among these was a demand for a clear assurance of Dominion Status within a definite time-limit, an Indian majority in the Viceroy's Council, control of defence by an Indian member and organisation of defence forces on a national basis.

None of these demands, as we know, were conceded. But that did not prevent the Federation from reiterating and elaborating them on subsequent occasions and at the same time deploring "the resort to Civil Disobedience by the Congress as it still further complicates the difficult situation in the country."

Slowly, however, the bulk of the Liberals began to grow impatient over the deadlock in the country and continuation of the bureaucratic form of administration. This impatience led to the emergence of the Non-party Political Conference, the origin and development of which will be traced in a subsequent chapter.

**T**HE Communists of India—and they are a growing fraternity—represent a virile group of workers with

considerable mass following During this war, they have lived up to their reputation of extremism and have swung from violent opposition to the war effort to its intense support

But at the time we are dealing with, the Communist party of India was an unlawful organisation Of course it functioned secretly and used to produce a good deal of literature explaining the party "thesis" As far as the public and publishable utterances of the party members are concerned, it can be stated that they regarded the war as "Imperialist" The day had not yet come when "Imperialism became a prisoner in the people's camp" As such the Communists were the first victims of the Defence of India Rules Arrests began almost with the declaration of war, but the Government "offensive" was accelerated with the Bombay textile strike of March-April 1940 With the change of their policy, however, most of them, if not all, have been released

**BESIDES** the parties enumerated above there are a few eminent individuals with or without followers who have claimed to represent the view point of a large or small section of the people of this country, and in order to complete the picture of Indian political opinion during the war, we must make a casual reference to at least two of them—Dr B R Ambedkar and Mr M N Roy

Dr Ambedkar is in many respects a man to reckon with I have no doubt that he could satisfactorily fill and adorn a chair in any university But the sense of injustice, arising out of the deep and permanent wrong, that purblind Hindu orthodoxy has done to his community, has led him to a somewhat sterile position in the political field

In one of his earliest utterances during the war, Dr. Ambedkar supported the statement made by the Viceroy on October 18, 1939 "What else could the Viceroy have done in the circumstances of the case?" he asked. In the constitutional field Dr. Ambedkar, like Mr. Jinnah, claimed a veto "In any constitution that is framed, we shall claim the right that, whatever provisions may be made relating to our safeguards, must be certified as adequate by the accredited representatives of the Depressed Classes." And by and by the eminent gentleman slowly and silently found his way into the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Mr. M. N. Roy has always been a figure of mystery. From what little is known of him, he always seems to have found himself a square peg in a round hole. At the time the war broke out he was a Congressman, and in a bold, and as it turned out to be a ridiculously bold, bid to 'capture' that body he contested the Presidentship of the Ramgarh session of the Congress held in March 1940, and was defeated securing a paltry 183 votes as against 1,854 scored by his rival, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Therefore he founded the Radical Democratic Party "to lead the Indian people to the cherished goal of freedom through active, voluntary and purposeful participation in the world struggle against Fascism."

And the Indian people are still watching in amused expectation the efforts or the want of them of the new party, to lead them to the still distant and yet warmly cherished goal of freedom.



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## 8 THE MORAL PROTEST

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**T**HE Congress felt badly led down. It had openly disagreed with Gandhiji, expressed its inability to extend the principle of non-violence to India's national defence and had set forth the conditions which would enable it to throw its full weight into the effort for an effective organization of the defence of the country. The chief condition was a "demand for the constitution of a Provisional National Government composed of persons commanding the confidence of the various elected groups in the present Central Legislature, formed under the 1919 constitution of India."

The Congress Working Committee was astonished when the Secretary of State described this demand as "one that would raise the unsolved constitutional issue and prejudice it in favour of the majority and against the minorities." Therefore the Committee met at Wardha (August 18 to 23, 1940) and placed on record their opinion that the "rejection of the Congress proposals is a proof of the British Government's determination to continue to hold India by sword, and in view of the emergency they decided to call a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on Sunday, September 15, 1940."

Congress was at the cross-roads. Neither Mahatma Gandhi nor any leading Congressman had the desire to embarrass Britain. Gandhiji had repeatedly declared that he would do nothing to embarrass Great Britain. "She will be embarrassed if there is anarchy in India. That the Congress, so long as it is under my discipline, will not support. What the Congress cannot do is to lend its moral influence to Britain."

But what were they to do under the changed situation? The Government had virtually slapped them in the face. Should they continue to sit still with folded hands? Should they not even express their opinions? Should not such members of the Congress who did not hold the view that the question of India's freedom should not abide the issue of the war, speak out their minds?

India had been made a belligerent without her consent and against her repeated warnings. While they were willing to abstain from doing anything which might embarrass the British they could not carry "this self imposed restraint to the extent of self-extinction." Nor did Government improve matters by placing restraints on the activities of volunteer organisations. Should not the people even be taught to walk correctly? asked Mr C Rajagopalachari.

And when in September the Working Committee met in Bombay, the terrific London Blitz, the most devastating air war known to History was in progress and Congressmen like any others could not "withhold their admiration for the bravery and endurance shown by the British nation in the face of danger and peril."

The resolution adopted by the AICC at the recommendation of the Working Committee represented a compromise. It is indeed strangely silent about the future course of action. It merely pledged the Congress to act under Gandhiji's command. 'The Congress is pledged under Gandhiji's leadership to non violence for the vindication of India's freedom. At this grave crisis in the movement for national freedom the All India Congress Committee there

fore, requests him to guide the Congress in the action they would take"

I remember the scene distinctly. The many pillared trading hall of the Cotton Exchange was crammed to capacity with Congressmen all intently listening to Gandhiji as he unfolded his mind. Masses of men and women stood grouped round loud speakers in other floors and in the road outside. "I do not want England to be defeated, I do not want England to be humiliated" he said. He could even understand if Britain could not give Freedom to India at once. "Even if independence can be given by one nation to another, it is not possible for the English. They who are themselves in peril cannot save others." And while Britain was in peril the Congress could not embarrass her. But "the virtue of restraint cannot be carried to the extent of self-extinction—extinction of the national spirit wherever it may reside, whether among Congressmen or non-Congressmen."

Watching the events as they were taking place he felt "that there is something wrong, some injustice being perpetrated and that the voice of freedom is about to be stifled." Therefore he would go to the Viceroy, not to hold a pistol to his head, but to find out if his assumptions were right. He made it clear that there was to be no mass Civil Disobedience. There might be individual Civil Disobedience—even of that he was not sure. He also gave an indication that Satyagraha might be on the issue of free speech and Civil Liberty for everyone because these two were the "root" and "foundation" of Swaraj.

Answering a criticism that he had raised an irrelevant issue Gandhiji later asserted "Freedom of speech and corresponding action is the breath of demo-

eratic life Freedom of propagating non-violence as a substitute for war is most relevant when indecent savagery is being perpetrated by the warring nations "

And so he went once again to see the Viceroy. The interview took place at Simla on September 27 and lasted for three hours and a half Three days later the Viceroy wrote a letter to Gandhiji summarising the position as it emerged after the interview "It would clearly not be possible" he wrote, "in the interests of India herself, more particularly at this critical juncture in the war to acquiesce in interference with the war effort which would be involved in freedom of speech so wide as that for which you have asked ".

To this Gandhiji's reply was that the Congress still desired to refrain from embarrassing the British Government, but it could not make a fetish of such policy by denying its creed "The immediate issue is the right to exist, which broadly put, means free speech" This the Congress wanted not merely for itself but for all And he added "if the Congress has to die it should do 'o in the act of proclaiming its faith "

Therefore with the approval of the Working Committee (October 11 to 13) Gandhiji launched a campaign of individual Satyagraha Shri Vinoba Bhave, a Sanskrit scholar and an inmate of his Ashram was the first Satyagrahi chosen by Gandhiji He inaugurated this movement of moral protest by delivering an anti-war speech before a rural audience in the village of Pauniar, seven miles from Wardha, on October 17, 1940 He was allowed to carry on for four days, was arrested at Deoli on October 21, tried at Wardha the same day and sentenced to three months' imprisonment

Then there was a pause, which was broken on the evening of October 31, when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested at Chheok railway station. There were spontaneous demonstrations not only in India but elsewhere. And when Panditji was tried at Gorakhpur and sentenced to four years' imprisonment, progressive opinion the world over, was loud in its condemnation of such a 'savage' sentence.

The second phase of the Movement started with the arrest of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on November 17. He had given notice of his intention to offer Satyagraha. He was arrested before he could do so, and thereafter, that became the technique for all arrests. Later in the course of the campaign the Lahore High Court held that the mere giving of notice was not an offence, but except in the Punjab the practice continued. By the close of the year 11 members of the Congress Working Committee, 176 members of the AICC, 29 ex-ministers, 22 members of the Central Legislature, 400 members of various Provincial Legislatures, had been arrested.

Only once the Congress divided its attention from this campaign. That was when the Working Committee met at Wardha (November 3-6) after the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru and "in view of the necessity to oppose the Bill introduced by the Government to finance the war", summoned the Central MLAs to Delhi. The result was that the Bill was rejected by the House.

The Movement reached a further stage when Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress President was arrested at Allahabad on December 30. He was tried at Naini jail and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment.

Throughout the year 1941 the movement continued and slowly spread to the remote corners of the country. On the whole it was conducted in an atmosphere of Non-violence.

"I shall give a good account of my stewardship," Gandhiji had promised, addressing the AICC meeting in September 1940. He did. By December 3, 1941 when the Government announced their decision to release the Satyagrahis all over India, nearly 25 000 Satyagrahis had been arrested and convicted, and fines amounting to nearly six lakhs of rupees had been imposed on Satyagrahis by various courts. Besides, in the North-West Frontier, and partly in Bengal Satyagrahis were allowed to carry on their work without interference.

THIS little movement of "moral revolt" of India staged amidst the "crumbling ruins of civilization strewn like a vast dung-heap of futility" failed, of course, to deflect British politicians from their set policy. But in the hearts and minds of thinking men of India, the continued obduracy of the Linlithgow-Amery-Churchill team gave rise to a sense of disillusionment and frustration. Rabindranath Tagore beautifully expressed this feeling in a message he gave to the world on the occasion of his 61st birthday.

"It is no longer possible for me," he said "to retain any respect for that mockery of civilization which believes in ruling by force and has no faith in freedom at all. By the miserly denial of all that is best in their civilization, by withholding true human relationships from Indians, the English have effectively closed for us all paths of progress."

The Non Party Political Leaders' Conference which met in Bombay on March 14, 1941, was perhaps a small but concrete expression on the political plane of the desire to induce the British to open the door of progress which they were wilfully keeping shut.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was president of the Conference which was attended by nearly 40 eminent men, including Sir Jagdish Prasad, Sir N. N. Sircar, Mr. V. D. Savarkar and Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherji. Other leaders like Mr. V. S. Srinivas Sastry extended their support to the decision of the Conference. It attracted greater support when it met again at Poona on July 27. Dr. Sir S. Radhakrishnan, Sir Mirza

Ismail and Dr. Sachidananda Sinha being among those who attended

The trend of speeches made by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and other members at the Bombay Session was that the Government should prove its *bona-fides* in the matter of transfer of power to Indian hands. They should take the initiative in getting together leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League in an effort to resolve the political deadlock. If that was not found possible they should take steps to see that "the large and unorganised but still powerful moderate opinion" should be satisfied so that they would exert such pressure on the parties which were in opposition that "the face of Indian politics would undergo a healthy change"

The Conference, therefore, resolved that the whole Executive Council of the Viceroy, including the holders of the portfolios of Finance and Defence should consist of non-official Indians drawn from important political elements in the public life of the country. During the period of the war, the conference was content that the reconstructed Centre should be responsible to the Crown, but it should act on the basis of joint and collective responsibility. This would not be a "National Government" in the legal and constitutional sense, but would be in the spirit of what progressive opinion desired. Further the conference urged that in regard to all inter-Imperial and inter-national matters the reconstructed government should be treated on the same footing as the Dominion Governments.

A second session of the Conference was held at Poona on July 26 and 27. The expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council had been announced



only four days earlier. But the Government communique had made it clear that this had no political significance but was only "a result of the increased pressure of work in connection with war." This announcement as well as the general attitude of the Government of India and the utterances of Mr Amery came in for severe criticism at the Conference. The Conference adopted two resolutions. The first demanded a complete reconstruction of the Viceroy's Council and urged a declaration specifying a time limit after the war within which the new constitution for India, according to her the same status and functions as Britain and the Dominions, should be inaugurated. The second resolution demanded that immediate steps be taken to examine the main lines of the future constitutional changes in India with a view to ensuring the unity and integrity of the country.

The expansion of the Viceroy's Executive Council after such a long time was, in fact, a curious proceeding. It was first vaguely hinted by Sir Samuel Hoare in October 1939, definitely promised by Lord Linlithgow in August 1940 and was actually carried out in July 1941. But when it did materialise a member of the Central Legislature described the change in Government's policy as only "a change from drifting to bungling." A medical member put the same point pithily when he said "even as an eyewash it is imitation boric." The expansion consisted of a bifurcation of portfolios already held by Indians in order to provide for three more Indians, creation of two minor portfolios of Information and Civil Defence—the latter not having anything to do with the military department at all, and lastly, no change at all in the key portfolios held by European officials.

(It may be added that the Executive Council received a second dose of expansion on July 2, 1942, by the addition of three more seats making a total of 15, but has since been reduced by deaths and resignations)

Although Mr Amery described the new members of the Council as a "team of ability" India remained unmoved by the step. Mahatma Gandhi said that the announcement did not affect the stand taken by the Congress and Mr M A Jinnah asserted that it would not secure the whole-hearted, willing and genuine support of Muslim India.

In fact the one solid and immediate result of the expansion was the complete alienation of the sympathy and support of Mr M A Jinnah and the Muslim League. Sir Sultan Ahmed, a member of the Muslim League, was among those who had joined the expanded Executive Council. At the same time a National Defence Council of 30 members was also set up. Among those who had agreed to serve on this Council were Sir Mahommed Sadulla, Prime Minister of Assam, Mr A K Fazlul Huq, Prime Minister of Bengal, Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, Prime Minister of the Punjab, the Nawab of Chhattari and Begum Shah Nawaz—all members of the Muslim League.

This naturally roused the anger of Mr Jinnah and the League. The League was no longer a loose political group of individuals who acted, each according to his light. It was making a bid to become a close-knit and effective organisation. It could not therefore, tolerate the 'defection' of these members "behind the back of the leader of the organisation knowing full well the express decision of the Council of the League rejecting a scheme on similar lines."

As usual Mr Amery added fuel to the fire when in the course of a speech in the House of Commons (August 1, 1941) he said that he was glad "to think that regardless of party leaders and in defiance of party discipline, patriotic Indians have come forward to work for India's defence" In the view of the Working Committee of the League this amounted to "casting a serious reflection on the patriotism of those who do not approve of the scheme and lauding the conduct of those who have been deliberately and by various manoeuvres weaned to commit a breach of party discipline"

Therefore the Committee met on August 27 and threatened to take disciplinary action against all the members who had joined the two Councils, unless they resigned therefrom Sir Mahommed Sadulla and Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan decided to toe the party line and resigned The Nawab of Chattari escaped between the horns of the dilemma by the lucky circumstance of his having been appointed the president of the Nizam's Council of Ministers The other members were expelled

Mr Jinnah may have been unappeasable But the new Indian members of the Viceroy's Council, appeared to be responsive to public opinion And public opinion took the concrete shape of a resolution sponsored by Mr N M Joshi in the Central Assembly calling upon the Government to release all political prisoners Although there was a fair amount of backing in the House Mr Joshi withdrew the resolution, because, it was stated at the time, the subject was already engaging the attention of the members of the Viceroy's Council

## FREEDOM FIRST

True to expectations the Government decided on December 3, 1941 to release all prisoners whose offence had been "formal and symbolic". And it was time too, for just four days later came Japan's treacherous attack on Pearl Harbour!

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# 1 SHADOWS OF THE RISING SUN

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**A**T half-past one, on the afternoon of December 7, 1941,, without notice or warning, while the smiling Mr Kurusu still smiled and laughed and joked in a seemingly desperate attempt to induce Washington to change its stiffening attitude swarms of Japanese planes launched an attack on the Hawaiian island of Oahu and the big Naval base at Pearl Harbour and on Manila in the Philippines, the far Eastern bastion of America. It was only the next day that Japan found breath to make a formal declaration of war. And by the time the Allies rubbed their eyes and sat up, Shanghai and the Wake Island had been occupied. Japanese troops were marching through Thailand, Japanese planes had raided Penang, and Japanese ships had dumped landing parties at Kotabahru in the Northern tip of Malaya and in many other places.

From that day disaster after disaster overtook Allied arms and possessions. Shock succeeded shock followed by unending retreats. On December 10 it was officially announced that the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse," alleged to be unsinkable had been sunk. Inside of a week Japanese forces had crossed Malaya and penetrated into Burma. On December 25 Hong Kong surrendered. Singapore fell on February 15 and Java collapsed on March 7. British forces evacuated Rangoon on March 9 and all Burma was over run by Japan by the end of May. Early on the morning of April 6 Japanese bombers paid a surprise call at Vizagapatam and Cocanada. The next day an alert was sounded in Madras, followed by an incredible panic and exodus. The Civil Government lost

## FREEDOM FIRST

its nerve, advised people to evacuate from Madras, and itself followed the advice when the Secretariat quit the city on April 13 -

It is necessary to bear in mind the chronology of these events occurring in such startling succession for they had far reaching repercussions on the political situation in India. First and foremost the war which was like the noise of a distant drum to the Indian public, suddenly became a stark and insistent reality, and problems which had seemed but vague and shadowy now became sharp and urgent. People in India had not believed that a war in the East was possible. This was not due to complacency but to a bitter appreciation of the capacity of Britain for appeasement. It may also be stated that Indians like others had completely underrated the power of Japan. American Military experts had bragged that they would finish Japan in 24 hours. I remember how a famous British knight and millionaire fresh from a visit to occupied China told the members of the Journalists' Association in a confidential talk, that Japanese planes like Japanese toys were short-lived. Their average life was no more than 50 hours.

Just as the myth of German invincibility was shattered as the lion-hearted defenders of Stalingrad hurled back wave after wave of the Nazi invader, the myth of White superiority was shattered as they scampered out of the Empire on which they had boasted the sun never set. The men who sat prim and aloof in top hats and tail coats while the dark skinned "Natives" salaamed and passed by, were now on the run, not caring to stop and see if they had their pants on. Their prestige had vanished. Politically speaking this loss of prestige finished the last argument in favour of Dominion Status. That argument was the

selfish desire to seek protection under the mighty wings of Britain. Now it became clear that although Britain was still a great power, India could not, at all times and under all circumstances rely on Britain to protect her. That task she would have to shoulder herself, of necessity if not out of self-respect.

The second factor which greatly affected the minds of the Indian people was the innumerable poignant and scaring stories brought by evacuees who began to pour into India, as a result of Japan's attack in the East. Considerable number of Indian forces were stationed at Hong Kong and Singapore. Malaya was thought to be so intimately connected with India that in the spring and summer of 1941, parties of leading Indian journalists had been taken on a tour of Malaya. And as the Japanese hordes marched from victory to victory, the people ran in terror. Typical of the harrowing tales brought by them was a long statement recounting the plight of Indian evacuees from Singapore, given by Mr R Joomabhai, president of the Indian Chambers of Commerce, Singapore, which was widely published in the Indian press early in March (The Bombay Chronicle, Friday March 6). He gave a vivid account of the losses suffered by the evacuees, the harsh treatment meted out to them by the Dutch authorities in Palembang and Batavia, the indifferent attitude of the British Consul at Batavia and the unhelpful treatment of the Ceylon Government.

The Japanese attack on Rangoon on Christmas Day 1941 was the first big yolt to Indian complacency. Rangoon was almost an Indian city. The exodus from Burma started with that attack and soon it developed into a veritable rout of civilian morale. Indian evacuees who were at first debarred from using the land route witnessed hellish scenes when they were at

last permitted to go. It became a familiar thing to abandon a member of a family struck with cholera to die on the roadside and go ahead. The roads were strewn with the dying and the dead, the corpses decaying with maggots. Often evacuees in vehicles had to pass over dead bodies. The horror of the situation was made more frightful by the callousness and cruelty of officials and those in charge of facilities of communication who heartlessly exploited the needs of the refugees. Even when the weary travellers had streamed into India their sufferings were not at an end. To use the words of a resolution adopted by the Working Committee of the Congress and confirmed by the A I C C "The officials whose business and duty it was to protect the lives and interests of the people in their respective areas, utterly failed to discharge that responsibility and ran away from their post of duty, sought safety for themselves, leaving the vast majority of the people wholly uncared and unprovided for. Such arrangements for evacuation as were made were meant principally for the European population and at every step racial discrimination was in evidence."

The Committee also adopted another resolution regarding the "recent extraordinary happenings in Burma and notably in the city of Rangoon." But the publication of this resolution was banned by the Government, and even the fact that the resolution was about happenings in Burma is known only by the opening words quoted above, which were cited in the notification promulgating the ban. Mr Amery, the secretary of State for India, in reply to a question in the House of Commons stated that the resolution was reached "on gross misrepresentation of facts or on unverified rumour" and that it criticised "in unbridled terms the recent actions of the military and civil



authorities in India and Burma." But the Congress President, in the course of a statement (Calcutta, May 8, 1942) said "I affirm with the fullest sense of responsibility, that not a single phrase of the resolution is either based on unverified rumours or misrepresents facts. Whatever is said is based on solid facts derived from the most responsible and reliable sources." He also challenged Mr Amery that the resolution may be put to proof and stated that he would "unhesitatingly express regret on behalf of the Working Committee, and withdraw the resolution," if the information on which it was based was found incorrect.

What is important to remember in this connection is not the truth or falsity of particular statements, but the fact that such statements were being made by hundreds and thousands of people all over India. If you travel on any South Indian railway and if no policeman is looking, you might come across beggars singing ballads about the retreat of the British from Burma. Such accounts created a sense of terror. In the logical plane they pointed to the need to organise for strong resistance against Japan. At the same time they accentuated the already existing feeling of bitterness against the White *Sahebs*, who had been charged with the defence of Burma and were equally charged with the defence of India.

While such were the feelings of the masses, we have to note briefly the feelings of the leaders. Perhaps the one man who reacted most acutely to the travails of Indians in Burma and Malaya was Mr C. Rajagopalachari. He felt that the need to defend India from Japanese aggression should overshadow all other considerations. To borrow one of his parables, simply because a robber had come and snatched away one's wife and children one could not tell his wife and

children "Now that he has taken you, it is his job to protect you. My duty ends" It may be that you had to rescue your wife and children from one robber. In the meanwhile you should make sure that they did not get killed in a fight between that robber and another.

Next to Mr Rajagopalachari came what may loosely be termed the Azad-Nehru group of Congressmen. Without in any way being panicky, they were prepared to go farther than ever before in an attempt to arrive at an immediate settlement. Their original adherence to Complete Independence took second place to their desire for an opportunity, at once, to mobilise the country against aggression. As Edgar Snow so aptly put it, they, in common with the largest majority of Indians, regarded the after-war situation as less certain than after-life.

The two persons in whom the Japanese attack did not work any change were Mahatma Gandhi and Mr M A Jinnah. Nothing could bring the Mahatma down from his lofty eminence. He talked of facing the Japanese with Non-violence. There was nothing surprising in that. He would try to wean even a tiger to Non-violence. Whether it was his superb faith in Non-violence or the logic of the British debacle in Malaya and Burma that led him to launch the 'Quit India' campaign, one thing seems perfectly clear—it was not appeasement. His denunciation of Japan was unmeasured.

As for the Quaid-e-Azam, his published utterances seem to indicate that he was not moved unduly by the approach of Japan. He stuck to his quarter share of Hindustan's flesh. There could be no co-operation without Pakistan. Of course, as usual, this was sound

strategy After all the tiger of Bengal and the lion of the Punjab (Mr Fazlul Huq and Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan) were leading the Muslims on the path of co-operation And this way the Muslims of the League persuasion could have the best of both worlds

Another aspect in which the onward rush of Japan is closely connected with developments in India is that it was a kind of barometer of Britain's goodwill towards India Marshal Chiang Kai Shek arrived in India the same day that the Japs landed in Singapore and Singapore was lost while the Chiang's were still here A fortnight later even the London "Times" and Lord Halifax were pleading for action in India The decision to send Sir Stafford Cripps on his mystery mission to India was announced two days after the evacuation of Rangoon and four days after the fall of Java It is therefore necessary to bear in mind the close relation of military events to political developments in India

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## 2 THE VEXED QUESTION

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**T**HURSDAY, December 4 1941 was a day of great happiness and greater expectations in India I remember a kind of impromptu reunion meeting at the foot of the statue of Sir Phirozshah Mehta opposite the Corporation building in Bombay That afternoon, much to their own surprise, a large number of political prisoners confined at Thana were told that they could go home They had packed up their jail kit in a hurry, marched to the station and had taken a train to the city

The Bombay Provincial Congress Committee gave them a hastily improvised but hearty welcome There, at the foot of the imposing statue of a great Indian patriot, the just released Satyagrahis, some of whom had grown respectable beards and were almost unrecognizable on that account embraced their happy and surprised friends and co-workers The Satyagrahis themselves were most eager for news and were quite happy when we told them that at noon that day Pandit Nehru had been released from Naini jail to be followed a few hours later by Maulana Azad the Congress President They were just in time to join a party given by Mrs Vijayalakshmi and Mr R S Pandit to celebrate the birthday of their niece Indira

And that was about all The communique of the Government of India announcing the release of the politicals had said that the Government had arrived at that decision 'confident in the determination of all responsible opinion in India to support the war effort until victory is secured' What grounds they had for such confidence it is indeed difficult to see For on

Meanwhile Japan's entry into the war only intensified the clamour of those who were already calling for a revision of attitude both on behalf of the British Government and the Congress. Moved into action at the alarming situation which was developing in the Far East, the Parliamentary Labour Party established, for the first time, a committee to deal exclusively with Indian problems. The feeling in the party was reflected by the "Daily Herald" which denounced the "lump and shoulder shrugging resignation" which had marked the attitude of the British Government in recent months, and emphatically declared; "we want India on our side, not merely detesting our enemies as Gandhi and Nehru detest them, not merely hoping we shall win but helping us to win, fighting, thinking and working with us"

"And as far as the Congress was concerned there was more than a casual desire to fight, think and work with Britain. The day after Japan's entry into the war, Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking at Lucknow, unhesitatingly declared that his sympathies lay with Russia, China, America and England. "But in spite of my sympathy for the group, there is no question of my going to help Britain. How can I fight for a thing which is denied to me—Freedom?" And significantly enough the same day (December 12, 1941) Mr. Amery stated in the Commons that the release of Congress leaders from prison was unconditional and added "no change is involved in the declared policy of the Government regarding the future constitutional advance"

It was not, therefore, surprising that the Congress President announcing a meeting of the Working Committee a couple of days later, struck a pessimistic

note "There is no dogma in our political creed. If the circumstances change, we should certainly change our attitude. But has any change come over circumstances?" he asked, and proceeded to point out that since the Congress Working Committee had last met 15 months ago "not a single incident reflects the slightest change in the attitude of the British Government. Under these circumstances I am unable to visualise a change."

And as though to prove the President's thesis the Viceroy delivering the annual winter oration at the Associated Chambers of Commerce, Calcutta, the next day, referred to his famous pronouncement of August 8, 1940 and said that the appeal did not secure the response for which he had hoped, and that, although he was prevented from going ahead on the lines proposed by him, he would repeat that the guarantees, undertakings, pledges, intentions and attitude of His Majesty's Government as explained in his statement towards the future constitutional development of India and the machinery by which it was to be brought about were as valid to day as when they were spoken. It was in commenting on this speech that Mr C. Rajagopalachari said that the "soldier spirit and not the spirit of the conveyancing lawyer must inspire the British Government, if they wish to justify their rule over India until the present crisis."

Similar feelings were voiced by Mr M. A. Jinnah, who in the course of an interview on December 17 stated that it was clear that neither the Viceroy nor His Majesty's Government desired India's whole-hearted co-operation, but merely demanded "obedience and slavish assistance without any real voice or share in authority of the Government and defence."

While the general view at that time was to lay the blame entirely at the door of the Government for the continuation of the impasse, there was one great politician, Mr C Rajagopalachari, who held and propagated with all his persuasive eloquence, the view that the adherence of Mahatma Gandhi to Non-violence was a great stumbling block in the path of settlement between the Congress and the Government. The incursion of the question of Non-violence, into that of National Independence, already complicated by a conflict between India's desire to attain freedom and her admitted sympathy for the Allied cause, has contributed no little to the confusion of the public mind and needs to be carefully disentangled.

As Mr C Rajagopalachari in his Convocation address at the Lucknow University (December 13, 1941) said "Twenty-two years ago, Mahatma Gandhi took the Congress by storm when he showed us a way out of the blind alley of unsuccessful constitutional agitation. He taught us the way of non-co-operation and Satyagraha, forms of non-violent attack which we have practised with a considerable amount of success during the past two decades."

But the onset of the war, as Rajaji said, interfered with the progress of the cult of Non-violence. At first Gandhi himself to a little extent and most of his followers to a large extent, were suddenly shaken in their complete faith in Non-violence. In fact Gandhi's seeming defection from the cause created so much consternation among those whom he had educated into a faith in complete Non-violence, that they posed the urgent question 'If gold rust, what shall iron do?' Presently the gold came out truer than ever from its period of doubt. But the Congress Working Committee asserted its independence, and

boldly differed from Gandhiji, because it claimed that the Congress was a political organisation whose object was to achieve the political Freedom of India. As Maulana Abul Kalam Azad explained in a speech (Bombay, August 1, 1940) it was true that the weapon of Non-violence had taken them far. Gandhiji wanted them to go farther. But the implication of following him would have been far-reaching. It would have meant that they would have to put aside the task of political Independence and set themselves the task of educating the people in the path of Non-violence. That meant that the struggle for Independence would have to be abandoned. Their chief object would then be to set up a State, unique in the world, a State that had no soldiers, no arms.

It was this consideration which had led the Committee to issue a statement clarifying its position on June 17, 1940 (see Book I, Chapter V). The statement paved the way for the Poona Offer. We have already seen how the Offer was ignored and so led to the decision to offer Satyagraha. This brought together again the Working Committee and Gandhiji. The position was explained as follows by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in the course of a speech at Chowpatty, Bombay, on Friday, December 19, 1941. "Everybody knows how far Gandhiji went in this matter (of Non-violence) but the Congress went with him so far as to say that they could not participate in the war, because the British Government had closed all avenues of honourable participation. Both these attitudes, however, led to the same result. The result was expressed in the resolution of September 15, last year (1940)."

It may, perhaps, also be stated that this step was a matter of immense satisfaction to the members of



the Working Committee. But obviously Gandhiji was not completely untroubled in his conscience. At Bombay he eagerly welcomed the members of the Committee back into his fold as so many prodigals come home. He hoped also that through non-violent action which he initiated he might strengthen the general faith in non-violence. In the course of various pronouncements he made while the Individual Civil Disobedience movement was in progress, Mahatmaji had expressed the view that there could be no settlement with the Congress short of Complete Independence and Independence could not come through any settlement during the war "for the simple reason that the Congress cannot commit itself to active help in the war with men and money"

This view was objected to by various persons including the Congress President whom Gandhiji met in Naini jail in February 1941. Therefore, Gandhiji while claiming that his interpretation of Congress policy as contained in the resolution passed by the A I C C in 1940, was correct, stated that he had no authority to interpret the resolution. The only authority he had was to conduct the campaign of Civil Disobedience. And he conducted it with the full determination to get the position cleared at the first possible opportunity. And that opportunity had now arrived.

Mr C Rajagopalachari, who was released earlier than the Congress President and Pandit Nehru, and knew the working of Gandhiji's mind, raised the issue in the clearest possible manner in the course of his speech at the Convocation of the Lucknow University. "Some of us feel that our struggle cannot simultaneously bear the weight of two such major

issues, the issue of British control over India and the demand for its total removal, and the issue of non-participation in war, total and irrespective of equity or policies of alliance to secure just ends," he said. This, plus the situation arising out of the entry of Japan into the war formed the subject matter of discussion by the Congress Working Committee which met at Bardoli during the last week of 1941.

The situation at that time was described by Dr Pattabhi Seetaramayya in terms of a game of cards. "Seven friends are playing the game" said Dr Pattabhi. "Mr Amery's trump is 'Be United', Lord Linlithgow's trump is 'August 8', Mr Jinnah's is 'Pakistan', Mr Rajagopalachari's is 'Poona Offer', Pandit Nehru's is 'Complete Independence' and Mahatma Gandhi's trump is 'Non-violence'."

He went on to say that under such conditions no game could be played and the only thing to do was to redeal the cards. At the same time one essential fact could not be forgotten. "Indians cannot defend India on the happy principle of efforts going to the Indians and spoils going to the British."

And so the Working Committee deliberated for a week before setting out its conclusions in a series of resolutions. The Committee expressed their sympathy for the people of Malaya, Burma and the East Indies, sent their greetings to China and to Soviet Russia, recommended to villagers the increased growing of food crops, warned the dealers against hoarding and profiteering, called upon the people to remain cool and collected in the face of danger, and resolved to start volunteer organisations to train and help the people in self-defence and relief.

## FREEDOM FIRST

On the principal question of India's Independence and her participation in the war effort they restated their position in categorical terms

' The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably lie with the peoples who are the subjects of aggression and who are fighting for their freedom, but only a free and Independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis and be of help in the furtherance of the larger causes that are emerging from the storm of war

"The whole background in India is one of hostility and of distrust of the British Government, and not even the most far-reaching promises can alter this background, nor can a subject India offer voluntary or willing help to an arrogant imperialism which is indistinguishable from Fascist authoritarianism "

The Committee confirmed the resolution passed by the A I C C on September 16, 1940 in so far as it asserted that the offer of co-operation made at Poona had lapsed. But the biggest battle was over the question of the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The Committee was not prepared to agree with his interpretation of the Bombay resolution even if it meant sacrificing his leadership. They agreed with the view that "the resolution contemplated material association with Britain in the war" if the Independence of India were guaranteed. Gandhi's creed was different. "The testing time, however, has come for India and I who have an unchangeable belief in the efficacy of Non violence for the present distemper from which mankind is suffering, could not possibly in any manner, directly or indirectly associate myself with participation in the war" he said. And so he decided to stand down but bless the Congress.

In this manner the Bardoli deliberations decided once for all that as far as the war against aggression was concerned, the Congress as an organisation did not think in terms of Non-violence. It certainly liked to have the co-operation, guidance and leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, but on its own terms. This situation created a certain amount of confusion in the country at that time. In fact on January 3, 1942 four members of the Congress Working Committee, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Acharya J B Kripalani and Dr Prafulla Ghosh issued a statement asserting that "the condition of the countries involved in war, leaves no doubt in our mind to day that it would be nothing short of a calamity for the Congress to abandon Non-violence on any account". The signatories suggested that at the ensuing meeting of the All India Congress Committee members should be free to vote as they liked and not be bound by the convention of joint responsibility of the Working Committee.

The next day Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan went one step further and resigned from the Working Committee. "I want the freedom of India", he said, "and with me Non-violence is not a policy but a permanent creed. To my mind it is a positive, dynamic force and it is the only path which will save the Pathan from servility and self-destruction. Active Non violence is the key to India's salvation and therefore, I can never be party to participation not only in this war but any war".

The All-India Congress Committee was due to meet on January 15. Everybody feared that there would be a split. But informed opinion readily realised that even if there was a split, it was on a remote and

detrinaire issue and would not make any real difference as far as current politics was concerned. In the absence of a settlement with the Government the political result of the difference in the ranks of the Working Committee was a cypher. It could affect neither the solidarity of the Congress nor its policy.

This point was very well realised both in India and in England. On January 4, over a dozen prominent leaders including Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the Rt Hon V S Srinivasa Sastri, Sir P S Sivaswami Iyer and Mr M R Jayakar cabled an appeal to Mr Churchill who was then at Washington urging the need for some bold stroke of far-sighted statesmanship so as to transform the entire spirit and outlook of the administration in India. "Enable India to line up with anti-Axis Powers, Convert Central Executive into truly National Government and restore Popular Rule in Provinces" they said. The India League held a meeting on January 9 at Conway Hall in London when members of Parliament made angry speeches. Mr William Mellor went so far as to say that the Prime Minister's Indian record was 'dark and dismal', and asserted that he was a stumbling block to any settlement in India. The same day "The Daily Herald" attacked Mr Amery in an editorial describing him as a "weak and timorous Minister who will be remembered as a Secretary of State for India who, at a time of great emergency and a great opportunity, neither measured up to the emergency nor grasped the opportunity."

But Mr Amery could neither be bullied nor cajoled into dropping his trump card. Since the question of Congress co operation in the war effort did not arise, the Working Committee as a body resolved to support

the Bardoli resolution which was placed before the AICC without any amendments. In fact the Mahatma himself spoke and commended the resolution for the acceptance of the AICC. He stated that there was no cause for split on the issue of Non-violence. It is significant that Mahatma Gandhi who admitted that the resolution was a mirror of the Congress, subsequently reconciled himself to the position of continuing his leadership of the Congress on its own terms. When at a later date he announced that he could no longer give even his 'moral support' to Britain, it was not on the issue of Non-violence but because of Britain's treatment of India.

The only opposition to the resolution within the Congress came from the Communist Party. Although we have to take note of the change in the attitude of the Communist Party towards co-operation with Government in the war effort, its causes, in so far as they are wholly unrelated to any development in or affecting India fall outside the scope of this book. The change in their attitude is solely due to what they term the "transformation of June 22". They claim that the attack of Hitler on Communist Russia has changed the whole character of the war transforming what was an imperialist war into a Peoples' war.

The Communist amendment calling for a recognition of the changed character of the war was thrown out. Only 15 members in a house of 219 voted against the resolution. And if the Government of India were keen on pursuing the logic of their opinions it was time that they sent the Congress leaders back to jail. But that was not to be for several months yet.

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### 3 ERSATZ OLIVE BRANCH

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ONCE again the Congress, like Achilles, was sulking in its tent, the Government had not moved a step forward. But for the Congress to be inactive was next to impossible. While mournfully watching the political horizon for any signs of stirring, Congress organisations threw themselves with all their zeal into organising volunteers and training them for tasks of Civil Defence. The People's Volunteer Brigades proved a phenomenal success and demonstrated what could be possible under a peoples' government.

Meanwhile world events were moving to a climax. Easily the most notable event in the political history of India of this period was the arrival in New Delhi of Marshal and Madame Chiang Kai Shek. On the very day that Japan declared war against Britain and America, Mr Winston Churchill announced in the Commons that he had sent a message to Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek assuring him that henceforth Britain and China would fight the common foe together. And when the common foe was rushing headlong in a career of victory, it was but natural that China's Marshal should visit India to concert plans of common resistance.

The strange conceptions that prevailed in England regarding China and India, two nations of 800 million people comprising a third of the entire population of the world, even at so late an hour was incredible. As the *New Statesman and Nation* (Feb 1942) observed: "By an omission hard to understand our Chinese ally has no representative on the Pacific War Council that sits in London. The Indian Nation is

"represented" by Mr L S Amery When and how did it appoint him? An Empire so devoid of imagination and generosity will survive, if it does survive, by luck rather than leadership India's defences have been based on the assumption dating from a mid-Victorian era that danger threatened from the North The guns are trained in the wrong direction On the contrary it is the Russians and Chinese who are defending the roads to India " And yet a visit to the North West Frontier was an important item on the itinerary of Marshal Chiang Kai Shek Madame Chiang, however, had the good sense to keep back and pay a visit to the Taj, instead

The August visitors from China stayed in India for two weeks In the words of the Marshal himself, during these days he "discussed with the highest Civil and Military authorities as well as with his Indian friends the question concerning joint plans against aggression" He found to his great satisfaction that there existed among the people of India unanimous determination to oppose aggression Apart from the persons coming under the category of 'Civil and Military authorities' the Marshal met and talked to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mr M A Jinnah Mr Fazlul Huq, Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, not to mention a host of others like members of the Viceroy's Council and Princes

The Marshal's programme of interviews was not without its touch of drama arising out of the overcoming of difficulties caused by the deadening touch of officialdom and other extraneous factors One class of visitors whom the Marshal had to see out of politeness if not out of overwhelming desire, were chosen at the sweet pleasure of the Viceroy But there were others who could not be ignored Pandit Nehru, the



one Indian whom the Chiangs knew best and perhaps loved most hurried to Delhi from Cawnpore as soon as the arrival of the visitors was announced. He reached the inhospitable gates of Viceroy's house at 11 a.m. the day after the Marshal and Madame arrived. But he had to turn back disappointed and go again in the evening. Thereafter, they had it all their own way and he met them no less than four times.

The meeting between Mahatma Gandhi and the Marshal was a matter of touch and go for a long time. Gandhiji was not among the invitees. Secondly, the idea of Gandhiji going to Chiang Kai-Shek was contrary to Chinese usage, first because he was in the position of a host and secondly because he was the older man. Then a great personal sorrow befell Gandhiji in the death of Mr. Jamnalal Bajaj, who passed away on February 11. Ultimately the Mahatma journeyed to Calcutta where the visitors had arrived on their way back and had discussions with them lasting for four hours and a half.

Mr. M. A. Jinnah, on the contrary, received a message from the Viceroy through the Governor of Bombay but found at first that he could not change his programme in order to meet the Marshal. Subsequently, however, the two did meet in Calcutta and tried to understand each other's view point. The Marshal even carried away with him considerable literature presented to him by Mr. Jinnah, in order to enable him to understand the League point of view.

And through all these discussions and visits, it was Madame Chiang who radiated warmth and geniality. She met Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and Miss Indira Nehru, and spoke at a reception arranged for her by the All-India Women's Conference. At Calcutta during the famous meeting between Gandhiji and

Marshal, she caused surprise and amusement by appearing in a Khaddar sari and kumkum on her forehead. It was no wonder that Gandhiji, according to his own declaration at the last meeting of the A I C. C., fell in love with her. He also stated that she fell in love with him too.

Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek, on the other hand, looked serious—his face hardly mirrored any of his feelings. Nobody knew what passed through his mind till the eve of his departure. But on February 21, the Marshal and Madame broke their conspiracy of silence and sprung a surprise on India and the world. It was in a valedictory broadcast from the Calcutta station of the All-India Radio that they made a momentous pronouncement regarding the grant of political power to this country. The Marshal spoke in Chinese and Madame translated it in English. Even the fact of the impending broadcast was so little known that when the message was splashed in the papers the next morning it caused an agreeable surprise. And here is the sweetest bit from the broadcast.

"I sincerely hope and confidently believe that our Ally, Great Britain, without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India will as speedily as possible give them real political power, so that they may be in a position further to develop their spiritual and material strength and thus realise that their participation in the war is not merely an aid to the anti-aggression nations for securing victory, but also a turning point in their struggle for India's freedom. From an objective point of view, I am of opinion that this would be the wisest policy which will redound to the credit of the British Empire." He also remarked "should freedom be denied to either China or India, there will be no real peace in the world."

This statement, as already remarked, pleased every one, save one man. Mr Jinnah was upset. Just at the

time of the departure of the visitors he issued a statement observing that it was unfortunate that the Marshal should have indulged in generalities without understanding the political situation in India and the constitutional adjustments which are necessary "I am afraid," he added, "he is saturated with the ideas of those who surrounded him most while he was in India and it is a pity that he should have without careful study expressed his views which may be exploited to the detriment of Muslim India"

Next to the visit of the Chiangs the most important development affecting India was the reshuffling of the British Cabinet, involving the inclusion of Sir Stafford Cripps as a member of the War Cabinet. The reverses in the East had a disquieting effect on the British public. From the pubs to Parliament there was a vague feeling that something was wrong. On February 4 certain changes in the cabinet were announced. But the public noticed that Sir Stafford Cripps who had recently returned from Moscow had been conspicuously omitted. It became known that Cripps had been offered Lord Beaverbrook's job in the Ministry of Supply and had refused because it did not carry a place in the War Cabinet. When this fact became known the public reaction was so great that it brought Churchill to the brink of a crisis and caused him to make a wholesale reorganization of the Government. In this reorganization Cripps entered the War Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons.

Even before he joined the Cabinet Cripps stated in an interview that he had no intention to go to India, 'but it does not mean if 'someone' asked me, I might not go. It would attract me very much to go to India if I felt I could do any good to settle the Indian question. It is a question that badly wants settling. It is not a matter primarily for Indians but for Govern-

ment When Britain has settled her policy then I think Indians can be persuaded to agree " A couple of days later he stated at Bristol that he believed that India should be given a complete guarantee of Independence after the war

Therefore it was not surprising that speaking in the Commons on February 25, five days after his admission to the Cabinet, he stated that Government were "as much concerned as everybody else with the whole question of the unity and strength of India in the face of dangers which now threaten that country" He also gave a hint that the Government might soon arrive at some decision

Public opinion both in India and abroad was also pressing the British Government to do something A meeting of the Non-party Leaders' Conference was held on February 21 and 22 and sent frantic appeals to call a truce and restore constitutionalism Events at home and abroad were moving in such a manner that even the London "Times" was led to declare (Editorial, February 28) that British domination in the Far East could never be restored in the former guise and called for new men to make the new machine work

On the same day the 'New York Times' published a special interview with Lord Halifax British Ambassador to the United States expressing complete agreement with Sir Stafford Cripps on the need of India's political freedom

Only Mr M A Jinnah was ready with his veto in advance On March 6, a meeting of the Muslim League Party in the Central Legislature was held at Delhi with Mr Jinnah in the chair to consider the rumours regarding reported constitutional changes emanating from London and authorised the chairman to send a

cable to Mr Churchill stating that the party viewed "with grave alarm and apprehension reports that His Majesty's Government and the British Parliament may be stampeded into making a pronouncement or adopting a scheme" The cable further impressed on His Majesty's Government that no other declaration be made which would prejudice or militate against the Muslim demand for Pakistan nor any other scheme adopted or constitutional change made without the consent and approval of the Muslim League And the next day British forces withdrew from Rangoon'

Even the Government of Churchill and Amery could not keep quiet any longer As the official statement announcing the Cripps Mission stated "The crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made Britain wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of invaders"

Therefore, the Government had devised a grand strategy for India According to the announcement made on March 11 the Government refused to make a declaration "which would be rejected by the essential elements in the Indian world and which would provoke fierce constitutional and communal disputes at a moment when the enemy is at the gates of India"

Accordingly they proposed to send Sir Stafford Cripps a member of the War Cabinet, who had volunteered his services in that behalf, to India with sealed proposals so that he may "satisfy himself on the spot by personal consultation that the conclusions upon which we are agreed and which we believe represent a just and final solution will achieve their purpose"

In answering probing questions in the Commons, Mr Churchill requested that no comments should be made, in order to facilitate a settlement And even

## ERSATZ OLIVE BRANCH

Mahatma Gandhi for once said that he would act on the advice of Mr. Churchill! The Congress Working Committee was called to meet at once, which they did at Wardha on March 17 and 18. At the conclusion of the meeting the President issued a single line statement—"We do not want to prejudge the statement."

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## 4 THE POST-DATED CHEQUE

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**L**OOKING fresh and beaming genially Sir Stafford Cripps stepped out of a plane at Drigh Road, Karachi, bearing with him the latest proposals of His Majesty's Government for the resolution of the Indian impasse, on Sunday, March 22, 1942. Exactly three weeks later, on Sunday April 12, he left for London a sadder, but apparently not a wiser man.

When he came, Cripps was looked upon by practically everyone, except a few incorrigible sceptics, as the harbinger of a new and happier era in Indo-British relations. Some went so far as to expect that he had brought with him the substance of Independence that nationalist India had consistently been demanding. When he left he was just one more British Imperialist politician who had tried and failed to palm off on India the same old, half-hearted constitutional changes or reforms, as they choose to call it. Shankar, the cartoonist of the "Hindustan Times" summed up the whole story in his cartoon—"He came—He went." This cartoon depicts Cripps arriving in India dressed in khaddar and waving a Red flag and departing in a tailcoat and top hat.

Cripps left behind him a legacy of bitterness and frustration which India has not yet lived down. This is because Indians had come to look upon him as a radical, a friend of India and a staunch anti-Imperialist. Knowing his political background and career, Indian observers felt that if India could get justice from any British Statesman, it was Stafford Cripps alone.

Richard Stafford Cripps has had one of the most remarkable careers of any public man. Born April 24,

1889, the younger son of Lord Parmoor, he schooled at Winchester and went on to the London University. Studied Science, switched over to law, became a barrister, 1913 Brilliant law career followed. In last war, was in Red Cross in France, and later, a directing chemist in a Government explosive factory.

In 1924 he became a Socialist and was Solicitor-General in the Labour Government, 1930-31, having been elected to Parliament from East Bristol. Noted for his sincerity and austere way of life, he got the reputation of being a saint. Expelled from the Labour Party in 1939 for his support of the Popular Front movement, he was believed to have turned a near-Communist.

When war came he dropped his lucrative legal work and went on a tour of India and China in the course of which he met and stayed with Indian Nationalist leaders like Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru and repeatedly affirmed his support of India's claims for Independence.

Asked by Calcutta journalists how a Socialist could best serve the country and the cause of Socialism, he promptly replied "As I see it the first step in forwarding the cause of Socialism is the winning of the struggle for National Freedom." Further questioned, "will the Communal problem be solved so long as the Britishers are in India?" he endorsed in advance the view to be advocated by Gandhiji much later, when he said "I think the first step should be to get rid of British domination and win self government for India."

Later in the course of the war he offered his services unconditionally to Government. Was appointed Ambassador in Moscow, 1940. Returned home to .



resume his political career on Friday, January 23, 1942. On the basis of his Russian record he was in the War Cabinet before a month was out. And when it was soon revealed that he was flying to India with a surprise parcel, all his earlier declarations were hopefully recalled in an attempt to conjecture the nature of the goods he was bringing.

Arrived in New Delhi, Sir Stafford Cripps spent a couple of days at the Viceroy's House and then set up his headquarters at No. 3, Queen Victoria Road. And to this unpretentious, severely bureaucratic bungalow rolled the cars of innumerable leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. Jinnah. As the pressmen waited outside on the lawn, the cars continued to roll in and roll out, and each leader departed, hiding his true feelings behind simulated laughter, bearing with him a single sheet of paper on which were set out the proposals.

The Congress Working Committee, constantly in session, at the Birla House, the Hindu Mahasabha at their New Delhi headquarters and the Muslim League at Nawabzada Liaqatali Khan's residence, immediately started consideration and discussion of the scheme. The cat was out of the bag, but, as Shankar had already forecast in the very first cartoon he made on the arrival of Cripps, it was a dead cat—and stank in everyone's nostrils.

The Draft Declaration which Sir Stafford Cripps brought consisted of a preamble and a text of five clauses. The Preamble stated that in view of the anxieties created in Britain and India about the fulfilment of promises made in regard to the future of India His Majesty's Government had decided to lay down "in precise and clear terms" the steps which

they proposed should be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India "The object," it then proceeded to state, "is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs"

The text fell into two parts The first four clauses dealt with the manner in which the future Indian Union was to be brought into being Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities an elected body was to be set up to frame a constitution for India "Unless the leaders of opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities" the constitution-making body was to be elected on the basis of the Lower Houses of the provincial Assemblies (organised under the 1935 Act) with the addition of appointees made by the Princes in proportion to the population in their states The Constitution framed by this body was to be accepted by His Majesty's Government subject to two conditions First, any province of British India could refuse to accede to the proposed Union and become a Dominion on its own with "the same full status" as the Indian Union, the Princely States also need not adhere to the Union With such non-acceding provinces, His Majesty's Government declared their willingness to agree, if they so desired, upon a new constitution arrived at by an analogous procedure Secondly, a treaty was to be made between this constitution-making body and His Majesty's Government to make provisions for the latter's pledges to protect minorities and other matters arising out of the transfer of responsibility to Indian hands The treaty, however, was not to "impose any restrictions on the power of the Indian Union to decide in

future its relationship to other member States or the British Commonwealth "

The serious objections to this scheme may be listed before we proceed to examine the other part of the Draft Declaration. The first and most formidable objection to it was put in a nutshell by Mahatma Gandhi when he described the proposals as a "post-dated cheque". It assumed that both India and England would somehow blunder along through the war and blunder into victory with their present relationships intact.

Secondly it envisaged the possibility of more than one Union in India. But the question whether there was to be one or more Unions was not to be settled till after the constitution of the one Indian Union was framed by the Constitution-making body. That is to say the Provinces and the States were not to be asked to exercise their option at the very outset. It was obligatory on them to come into the Constitution-making body, and then they could walk out if they did not agree. The result would be that those provinces and States which desired to accede to the Indian Union would be burdened with a constitution in the making of which those who did not want to be governed by it had no small share. It would have been more logical and in accordance with the principle of self-determination to ask the participating units to make the choice of coming into the Union before they were given any place in the constitution-making body.

Thirdly the idea of the coming into existence of several unions in India with different constitutions and equal sovereign status ran counter to the principles developed historically by the nationalist movement which aimed at self-government in a single, independent, democratically organized India.

## THE POST-DATED CHEQUE

Fourthly the idea that the new Indian Union or Unions should make a treaty with Britain which, among other things, "will make provision, in accordance with undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities" was regarded as undermining the whole idea of national sovereignty. While a state could and should certainly give constitutional guarantees to its minorities the idea that it should give guarantees to another sovereign state for the protection of its own minorities was, to say the least, novel, and it was feared that it would only open the door for foreign intervention. Not even the Muslim League contemplated the continued intervention of Britain in Free India to enforce the protection of Indian Muslims.

Last, although it was suggested at the time that in the appointment of the representatives of Indian states to the constitution making body, the princes might use such machinery as existed in their states to send popularly elected representatives the Draft Declaration, as such, did not make any mention of this and seemed altogether to ignore the existence of State subjects.

All these objections had only a remote validity because they referred to something in the future. But what about the only too real present? This was dealt with by clause (e) of the Draft Declaration which may be cited in full.

During the critical period which now faces India and until the new constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort but the task of organising to the full the military moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-opera-

## FREEDOM FIRST

tion of the people of India His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the councils of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India "

The preamble to the declaration stated that the Declaration would be "in precise and clear terms" It is easy to see that clause (c) is put in anything but clear and precise terms It was not stated what form the immediate and effective participation of Indian leaders in the Councils of their country was to take And even the phrase "leaders of the Principal sections of the Indian people" was beautifully vague In fact Sir Stafford Cripps speaking in the House of Commons on April 28, 1942, on his return from India admitted that this part of the declaration was in "vague and general terms" as it was desired to leave the question open for discussion But leaving the question open for discussion did not imply absence of any definite view on the part of His Majesty's Government, as there was a specific reservation about Defence And Sir Stafford in the course of his Press Conference of March 29, 1942 made the position perfectly clear when he stated "The defence of India will not be in Indian hands, even if all the parties want it "

Just as His Majesty's proposals fell into two parts, their rejection also fell into two parts First every party and individual in India rejected and repudiated the proposals referring to the future for one reason or another The Working Committee of the Muslim League, in the course of a lengthy resolution released to the press on April 11, stated that in the Draft Declaration, a constitution making body had been proposed

with the primary object of creating one Indian Union whereas the Muslim League had finally decided that the only solution of India's constitutional problem was the partition of India into independent zones, and that the Mussalmans could not be satisfied with the mere right of non-accession. With regard to the interim arrangements the Committee said there was no definite proposal and they could say nothing till a "complete picture" was available.

The Hindu Mahasabha rejected the proposals for exactly the opposite reason. "The basic principle of the Hindu Mahasabha is that India is one and indivisible." After formulating their fundamental objection the Mahasabha stated that they were not so much concerned "with a declaration as to the future as with the question of immediate transfer of power and noted with regret that the scheme was "nebulous, vague and unsatisfactory with regard to the interim arrangements."

In rejecting the schemes the Sikhs wailed that "the cause of the Sikh community has been lamentably betrayed." The Standing Committee of the All-India States Peoples' Conference in rejecting the proposals said that "the whole approach to this question on the part of the British Cabinet is vitiated by the extraordinary assumption that only the British Government and the Rulers of the States count in the disposal of these vital issues. Nowhere is any reference made to the people of the States who number 90 and odd millions." The All India Muslim Conference and the Depressed Classes League joined in the general chorus of condemnation and rejection. Dr B R Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur M C Rajah in a joint letter to Sir Stafford bitterly complained that they were "absolutely convinced that the proposals are calculated to do the

envoy of President Roosevelt in India, offered his services to see if things could be smoothed over. All these attempts failed.

What exactly happened during this period and its implications are the subject of a tremendous controversy which shows no signs of dying down. Even the full facts of the complicated negotiations are still unknown. At least one important party has yet to speak. Col. Louis Johnson, has clearly hinted at the existence of a "Johnson version" of the story.

Meanwhile every kind of statement has been made, the most sensational of which is the declaration of Louis Fischer that "Cripps was bitched in the back." He has stated categorically

' Although Sir Stafford Cripps does not mention this essential cause of his failure in India and instead blames the collapse of the mission on Congress and on the Hindu-Muslim differences the British Government and the United States Government possess documents and reports which prove that Cripps failed because he promised India a responsible Cabinet Government at the beginning of his negotiations and then withdraw that promise "

Fischer subsequently wrote reiterating his view and also said that when Cripps made an offer of a National Cabinet, both the Viceroy and General Wavell cabled a threat of resignation to Whitehall.

Nor was Fischer the first to make such a suggestion. The "Statesman" of Calcutta writing editorially on April 11, immediately after the announcement of the failure and while Cripps was still in India said "So long as the India office and the Government of India draft the proposals no emissary can succeed and no effective effort will be made to cope with the hourly increasing danger to this country. a clean sweep of

personalities is needed. It is no use trying to carry on with the men who have wielded authority in the past. They did well according to their lights. But their lights are dim. Sir Stafford Cripps has been made a dupe, but the scheme will over reach itself."

It is impossible, at this stage to anticipate the final verdict of History. Without trying to disentangle the tangled skein it is enough for us to note that ultimately the British Government were not willing to countenance the formation of a government which would function as a National Cabinet free from the control of the India Office, nor were they prepared to permit the Defence Minister to exercise any powers pertaining to the control of war policies.

The position of the Congress *vis-a-vis* the Cripps' failure was most admirably stated in the course of a three hours' fighting interview which Pandit Nehru gave both to the foreign and the Indian Press on April 12. "Before the war," he said "we criticised the policy of appeasement in Munich. That outlook governs us today. I do feel definitely that it would be a tragedy for the World if Germany and Japan won this war and dominated the world. I don't want that to happen."

"I would have liked to play my part in this world drama more effectively. That was why I went to the utmost limit to come to terms with the British Government." Putting it more precisely he stated "For the first time in these 22 years, I swallowed many a bitter pill when I said I was prepared to agree to many . . . so as to somehow to come to an agreement."

But there was one cardinal principle for which he was prepared to swallow these bitter pills. That principle was defined by him in clear terms. "But ultimately, naturally, I have to judge every question from



the Indian viewpoint. If India perishes, I must say—selfishly, if you like to call it—it does not do me any good if other nations survive”

Explaining what Cripps had to offer from the point of view of the present he said “For the present the whole thing comes down to this, that we agree to join the Viceroy’s Executive Council practically unconditionally, except for the very vague background of what would happen in future. The picture he (Cripps) put forward to us was really the August offer repeated with minor changes. When I mentioned this to him he was hurt.”

At the same conference Jawaharlal explained the Congress view regarding defence. The popular conception of defence was different from that of the Government. It was not keeping a regiment here and there, but they wanted to mobilize hundreds of millions of Indians. They wanted to make every man and woman do something for war—make it a popular war. The military conception was to fight with their armies and, if the latter failed, to surrender, but their conception was different. They would not surrender whatever happened—whatever happened to military forces, popular resistance should continue to the end—as in China and Russia. Could they discharge their duty in this spirit? Could they make India hum as an organized unit of resistance? Could they make India feel that she was fighting her own war, for her freedom? That was their idea in asking for a popular conception of Defence, but the Government’s attitude as put to them was a singularly complacent attitude—a conception of India from a standpoint which was peculiar only to England. “We are in the right. All those who are against us, are not only in the wrong but damnably in the wrong.”

*Note.* For a more comprehensive examination of the Cripps proposals and the case against them see “Why Cripps failed” by Mr M. Subrahmanian published by The Hindustan Times press. I have derived much help from this book.

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## 5 THE STORM GATHERS

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**T**HERE is a story told of Mr C Rajagopalachari, that he once shot a man. It was during those distant and youthful days when he was a practicing lawyer at Salem. It appears that he was travelling in a bullock cart at night and he had with him a large sum of money. To enable him to guard this money, he carried a gun for which he had a licence.

While the ancient cart rumbled along on the uneven road lulling the traveller to a fitful sleep, the keeper of one of the toll gates which infest the rural parts of India, held up a smoky lantern and challenged the cart. Rajaji, half asleep, mistook him for a robber and straightaway opened fire. The man gave an agonising shout and fell down. The cartman who was in front and who had naturally seen who the man was, cried out in alarm. Suddenly become alert, Rajaji remarked in his usual manner "after all, when I shot him he could not have died," and proceeded to pick up the man who was injured in the leg and give him all the help he needed.

Mr Rajagopalachari has earned a very great reputation for the unflagging patience with which he can pursue a line of action dictated by a devastating logic. But the incident cited above throws light on the impulsive side of his character. Often, he is capable of doing something sudden and startling. And what he and a group of his followers did on the evening of April 23, 1942, was certainly more than sudden and startling.

The departure of Sir Stafford Cripps, following the failure of the negotiations, had left India disillusioned

Even at that hour of grave peril to her Empire, when the enemy stood poised on India's Eastern Frontier, not even the best of the British were capable of shedding their Imperialist outlook. But India could not cut her nose to spite her face, and because of her bitterness against Britain, surrender to the Japs. It was a cruel dilemma.

At the end of the month a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee had been called to meet at Allahabad to consider the situation arising out of the Cripps' failure. About this time, Mr C. Rajagopalachari and a few of his followers whom he had been able to convince of the correctness of his position threw a virtual bombshell into the political arena.

On April 23 forty six members of the two houses of the Madras Legislature met at the Hindi Prachar Sabha Hall, in a closed meeting and adopted a resolution recommending to the A. I. C. C. to "acknowledge the Muslim League's claim for separation should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing the future constitution of India," and to "invite the Muslim League for consultation for the purpose of arriving at an agreement and securing the installation of a National Government to meet the present emergency."

The basic reason behind this move was explained by the resolution itself which stated that 'to sacrifice the chances of the formation of a National Government for the doubtful advantage of maintaining a controversy over the unity of India is a most unwise policy and that it has become necessary to choose the lesser evil'. This resolution was adopted by 37 votes against six, three members remaining neutral.

The situation in Madras at that time was very critical. Following raid alarms earlier in the month, the civil government had moved out but ten days before. Only Mr Rajagopalachari, immediately after his return from Delhi after the Cripps negotiations, had raised his voice in calm courage. It can, therefore, be easily understood, how the party also came to pass a resolution voicing "the general feeling in this part of the country that there should be at this critical juncture a popular government in this province doing its utmost to secure the requisite conditions for the people to play their part. The party is of opinion further that to facilitate united and effective action in this regard by such a popular government, the Muslim League should be invited to participate in it."

These resolutions led to a tremendous accentuation of the bitterness already prevailing in the Congress ranks. Mr Rajagopalachari persistently argued that he was doing nothing more than pursuing the logic of the resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee on the Cripps proposals. That resolution while asserting that the Congress had been wedded to Indian freedom and unity, nevertheless stated that it could not "think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will." Mahatma Gandhi had also conceded the same principle of self-determination when he wrote in the *Harijan* on April 19. "If the vast majority of Mussalmans regard themselves as a separate nation, having nothing in common with Hindus and others, no power on earth can compel them to think otherwise. And if they want to partition India on that basis, they must have

the partition unless the Hindus want to fight against such a division "

But the feeling of resentment generated by the Madras resolutions was so great that Mr Rajagopalachari found his position in the Working Committee somewhat uncomfortable. Therefore, he declared that he would be failing in his duty if he did not endeavour to get the people to think and act in the direction in which his conviction led, and resigned from the Working Committee. Having thus freed himself he moved the Madras resolutions at the A I C C meeting at Allahabad on May 2. "Pakistan is only a ghost and I want to hold and face it," he declared. He roused laughter but did not win votes—not more than 15 at any rate.

But carried away by the sentiment generated by this resolution the A I C C adopted by a large majority a counter resolution submitted over the signatures of Mr Jagat Narain Lal and 52 others. That resolution expressed the opinion "that any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component state or territorial unit to secede from the Indian Union or Federation will be highly detrimental to the best interests of the people of the different States and Provinces and the country as a whole, and the Congress therefore cannot agree to any such proposal."

The adoption of this resolution has led to a great inter party controversy, and it has been stated that the resolution virtually annulled the resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee at Delhi and confirmed by the A I C C earlier in the same session. Without entering into a complicated examination of the issues involved the explanation of the Congress spokesmen may be simply stated. They claim that

this resolution is in no way contrary to the principle of self-determination. The Congress thinks that Pakistan is wrong. But if the majority of the Muslims think otherwise, the Congress recognises their right to have their own way and is not prepared to coerce them to change their opinion. At the same time the Congress has the right to stick to its own opinion that Pakistan is detrimental to National interests.

The sudden emergence of this controversy almost overclouded the main political issue which came up for consideration at Allahabad. The Government of India achieved a "scoop" with the publication of certain notes of discussions of the Working Committee, which were seized when the police raided the office of the AICC on May 26. Great doubt has been thrown by the persons most concerned on the correctness of the reporting and interpretation of the discussion contained in these notes. But even without the aid of these notes it is easy to reconstruct the position that faced the Congress Working Committee at that time, the nature of the decision taken then, the relation of that resolution to the one passed at the next meeting of the AICC in Bombay in August and the causes which led to such changes as are noticeable.

We have already noticed (see Book 1, Chapter V) how Indian political thought was faced with a great conflict of sentiments involved in its allegiance to India's freedom and its undoubted opposition to Fascism. All the subsequent actions of the Congress were influenced by this conflict. But in the light of the debacle of Malaya and Burma and the obduracy of the British government even at such a moment, in refusing to be governed by what Pandit Nehru called

a "popular conception of defence" Mahatma Gandhi seems to have felt that the two diseases had but one remedy—the withdrawal of the British power from India. He seems to have thought that the British Colonial class, having lost its old virility, courage and efficiency was not equal to bearing the brunt of a global war. He seemed to think that even the interests of Russia and China quite apart from India's own interests required the replacement of the present administration in India by a more virile administration broadbased on a will of the people.

He gave the first hint of the working of his mind in an article which appeared in the *Harijan* on April 26, 1942. It was in this article that he expressed the view that the real safety of India and of Britain lay "in orderly and timely British withdrawal from India."

But his view was not accepted by an important school of thought in the Congress led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Mahatma Gandhi has clearly disclosed this opposition in his letter to the Viceroy, dated August 14. He says

I have taken Jawaharlal Nehru as my measuring rod. His personal contacts make him feel much more the misery of the impending ruin of China and Russia than I can—than even you can. In that misery he tried to forget his old quarrel with Imperialism. He dreads much more than I do the success of Fascism and Nazism. I have argued with him for days together. He fought against my position with a passion which I have no words to describe. But the logic of facts overwhelmed him. He yielded when he saw clearly that without the freedom of India that of the other two was in great jeopardy.

But even the logic of facts as presented by a master logician of the calibre of Mahatma Gandhi seems to have taken months before it could make its conquest.

The draft resolution sent by Mahatma Gandhi for consideration by the Working Committee when it met at Allahabad on April 28 was not accepted. The resolution which was adopted by the Committee after four days' discussion asserted that India resents the treatment of her people as chattels to be disposed of by foreign authority. The resolution declared the conviction that India would attain her freedom through her own strength and would retain it likewise. The current crisis, as well as the experience of the negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps made it impossible for the Congress to consider any scheme or proposal which retained even in a partial measure, British control and authority in India.

But the most important part of the resolution read as follows.

'The Committee repudiates the idea that freedom can come through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the profession of that nation may be. In case an invasion takes place it must be resisted. Such resistance can only take the form of Non-violent Non-co-operation as the British government has prevented the organisation of national defence by the people in any other way. The Committee, would, therefore expect the people of India to offer complete non-violent non-co-operation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to them.

"We may not bend the knee to the aggressor nor obey any of his orders. We may not look to him for favours nor fall to his bribes. If he wishes to take possession of our homes and fields we will refuse to give them up even if we have to die in the effort to resist them. In places wherein the British and the invading forces are fighting, our non-co-operation will be fruitless and unnecessary. Not to put any obstacles in the way of British forces will often be the only way of demonstrating our non-co-operation with the in-



vader. Judging from their attitude the British Government do not heed any help from us beyond our non-interference."

From the language of this resolution to that of the resolution adopted by the Working Committee at Wardha on July 14 is a far cry. That resolution in clear and explicit terms stated:

"The events happening from day to day and the experience that the people of India are passing through confirm the opinion of Congressmen that British Rule in India must end immediately, not only because India in bondage can play no effective part in defending herself and affecting the fortunes of the war that is desolating humanity. The freedom of India is thus necessary not only in the interest of India, but also for the safety of the world and for ending Nazism, Fascism, Militarism and other forms of Imperialism and the aggression of one nation over another."

The one man who was responsible for this change was, of course, Mahatma Gandhi. He was, to use his own words, the *fons et origo* (the fountain and origin) of the 'Quit India' demand. The way that in the course of about two months Mahatma Gandhi worked up a world-wide propaganda campaign in support of his demand showed one more facet of his great personality.

It may also be stated that the economic conditions in India greatly worked in his favour. The mass of the Indian people habitually live below the level of subsistence. With such an ill-fed, unclad, ignorant mass of humanity, India can never hope to take a high place in the roll of nations. The existence of foreign rule which must seek, for its own maintenance, support of the vocal and influential elements in the population, would debar the taking of such radical steps as a popular government could venture to take

The handling of taxation, finance, currency and food problems of India added considerably to the distress of the people.

Economists of the Nationalist school of thought have pointed out that even the much boosted sterling repatriation has not worked to the advantage of India at this juncture because the amount could have been more profitably utilised for supplying capital equipment needed for existing and new industries. And, as for inflation, it is a proved evil, which even the powerful governments of England and America have avoided.

Over and above all was the food situation, which had, on the whole, kept on deteriorating. Whatever the causes—and their name is legion—the fact is that both in rural and urban areas there has been widespread scarcity, not to speak of unconscionable prices. Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress seem to have been particularly exercised about this matter from the very beginning. Almost immediately after the general jail delivery in December 1941, the Congress Working Committee raised the question of food and the various local and Provincial Congress organisations were actively engaged in devising measures to mitigate the hardship of the people in the matter of food supply. Mahatma Gandhi wrote more than once on the question and seriously warned against the possibility of food riots. Unfortunately his premonitions have since proved only too true.

Gandhi in particular, seems to have been concerned so much about the food situation that he has referred to it even in the course of his correspondence with the Viceroy. In his letter dated January 23, 1943, after citing other causes for the recent disturbances

he says "Add to this tale of woe the privations of the poor millions due to India wide scarcity which, I cannot help thinking, might have been largely mitigated, if not altogether prevented, had there been a *bona fide* National Government responsible to a popularly elected assembly" (After all the Communists are not far wrong when they ask for the release of Gandhiji for 'national defence and food')

While the bitterness caused by the failure of the Cripps' negotiations, the revolt of Mr Rajagopalachari, the increasing menace of invasion and the fast deteriorating food and economic situation, led the Congress Working Committee to accept Gandhiji's demand for the withdrawal of the British power and to launch a movement to secure this end, Gandhiji on his part whittled down the original demand considerably. These modifications are included in the resolution of July 14

In making the proposal for the withdrawal of the British rule from India the Congress has no desire whatsoever to embarrass Great Britain or the Allied Powers in their prosecution of the war or in any way to encourage aggression on India or increase pressure on China by the Japanese or any other power associated with the Axis group. Nor does the Congress intend to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the Allied Powers. The Congress is therefore agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India should they so desire, in order to ward off and resist Japanese aggression and to protect and help China. The proposal of the withdrawal of the British was never intended to mean the physical withdrawal of all Britishers from India.

It was this resolution which was referred for the consideration of the A I C C on August 7, in Bombay. The resolution which was placed before the

meeting confirmed the earlier one passed on July 14 and proceeded to restate the Congress case. The resolution pointed out that the possession of Empire, instead of adding to the strength of the Ruling Power, had become a burden and a curse. It reasserted the view that the peril of to-day necessitated the Independence of India. It also restated its view towards the freedom of other nations and to the preservation of peace in a future world order. It was because the Congress felt convinced that immediate Independence was necessary, not only for its own freedom but for the speedy defeat of the Axis that it felt "no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against the imperialist and authoritarian government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interests and in the interests of humanity." Therefore, the resolution sought sanction, "for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale." It also requested Mahatma Gandhi to "lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken."

This resolution was supported by all sections within the Congress except the small group of Communists and, therefore, as was long expected, it was passed with but 13 dissentient votes.

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## 6 TWO DAYS OF DESTINY

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**S**ILENT but smiling, Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, stepped out of the Nagpur Mail, on to the platform at Dadar packed with cheering crowds, at a quarter to eleven in the morning on Monday, August 3, 1942, still smiling, he drove out of the gates of Birla House, Mount Pleasant Road, at a quarter past six on the morning of Sunday, August 9, in a powerful police car, while a small crowd of humble and devoted people stood by, sorrowful and silent

The interval was a week of hectic activity, a week when the eyes of the world were on India and Bombay. Perhaps in no other week had India and Indian affairs figured so much in the world press. That week saw the terrific climax of a controversy that had gone round the beleaguered world and had produced the wildest reactions and stirred the deepest feelings. Journalists, as a class, were not unaware of the task that awaited them, reporters were not without a suspicion that they were approaching one of the big assignments of their lives. Therefore, I, in common with the rest, looked forward to the week, with considerable eagerness, spiced and salted with a good dose of trepidation.

Our expectations were more than fulfilled. Four days of meetings, private and public, each with its peculiar problem followed. So that by Friday, the day of days, when the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was to begin, we were already suffering from physical exhaustion and want of sleep. It was, therefore, in no very pleasant mood that we stuffed our pockets with notebooks and pencils and boarded the bus that was to take us to the Gowalia Tank maidan.

But as the bus approached our destination our drowsiness dropped off. The sight of that vast stream of humanity, going in one direction set our hearts beating faster and sent a gentle thrill through our limbs. Alert and galvanised, we applied ourselves to the task of finding our way to our appointed desks.

The arrangements at the AICC pandal were the product of an organising genius of no mean order. They had been explained to us several days earlier by Mr Nagindas T Master, President of the now unlawful Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and its Secretary, Mr S K Patil who was both the brain and the driving-power behind the whole show. And yet, we had to jump fences, break through cordons, drive under barricades, walk through the slush and spoil our clothes before we could finally arrive at the table bearing numbers corresponding to those on our tickets. And when we did arrive, we found all our seats occupied! And by the time the homeric battle for seats had been fought and won the squeaky voice of Mr Kripalani, the general secretary was calling for silence as the proceedings were about to begin.

And then as a group of girls began to sing 'Vande Mataram', all the thousands that had been jammed into every inch of space in that enclosure of 35 000 square feet stood up in silence. Even the late Mr S Satyamurthi, who, physically weak but very much alive in spirit, had been brought up with difficulty and lay on the dais on an assortment of pillows and cushions, did not think there was sufficient reason to keep lying.

As I surveyed that vast gathering, my attention was fixed on the centre of the dais where Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress President stood, side by side, and it occurred to me that the association of these two men

was one of the most significant things, in the contemporary life of this country

There they stood on the flood-lit dais. The well-groomed Maulana, with his greying hair brushed back, his small, shapely beard, his skin, almost the colour of a peach, glistening in the light of the arc-lamp, his ample shoulders and rounded body clothed in a trim laundry-fresh, silk sherwani—altogether a picture of dignity and culture. The Mahatma with his bald head and wrinkled face, his brown body naked but for the snow-white dhoti which covered him from waist to knee and the folded uparna draped around his shoulders, standing with his long thin staff in hand, eyes closed in meditation—altogether a picture of humility and santliness.

And as I looked on, it seemed to me that these two represented the two main trends of the civilisation, the warp and the woof of the social fabric of India today. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is a typical product of Islamic culture at its best—the culture of the Taj Mahal, the culture of Moghul architecture and painting. The Mahatma represented the more ancient and ascetic strain of Hindu civilisation, a product of the deep and tranquil wisdom of Buddha and the practice of self-effacement characteristic of Jain and certain other sects.

Here on the same platform, united by a common purpose were two men who symbolised these two strands in life. The Maulana Saheb represented the type which loves life for its own sake, does not scorn to drink deep of the joys of life and yet has enough passion for social weal and enough courage and determination to strive for its ideals if occasion demands. The Mahatma represented that restless spirit that ever hankers after perfection and dedicates itself for its accomplishment and reckes not what suffering it causes.

to itself and to others in the pursuit of what it regards as right. That two such types of persons, who would be poles apart in quieter times, had found sufficient identity of interest to work together was in itself a clue to the weight and significance, the vital importance of the cause they both valued.

But I had not much time to pursue my own thoughts. The initial formalities quickly over, the Maulana Saheb had launched himself into a speech whose eloquence held everybody spellbound. It was a truly statesman-like speech made in the spirit of one equal to another equal. It was the voice of India speaking with quiet and firm dignity to the assembled nations of the world. He seemed to say, "come, let's to the task, the task which you and I have equally in view. But let us march to it shoulder to shoulder as equals." The manner of its delivery was befitting its contents. It was not made in any bargaining spirit but in the spirit of one who knew what was rightfully due to him and who on his part was not afraid to do right.

In the course of this speech the Congress President explained that the demand they were putting forward before Britain and the United Nations was to be judged by one test. That test was whether for the sake of the defence of India, for her very survival, freedom was necessary. India had become a vital field of battle. If India were free, she could kindle a new light throughout the land and the cry of victory would ring from every corner. No army could wage a relentless war unless it had behind it an administration which had the fullest popular support.

Having thus once tested the gold of their demand, they applied to it yet another test. That test was "Are we contributing to other's defeat, to other's misfortunes?"



If their demand was such that it would not contribute to the strength of the Freedom Powers, would not promote the cause of those powers, fighting with valour for their freedom, the Congress would never have put forward such a demand. They had considered this question for full nine days. And, the Congress President said "Our demand is twice tested pure gold. Is the British Government prepared to allow its actions and policies to be subjected to these same tests?" he challenged.

Nor was the President unaware of the fact that their professions were not trusted. In making a call for the termination of mutual distrust he stated "There was a time for promises. But the resolution of July 14 makes one thing clear, namely, the condition of India and the World has reached a stage when it is absolutely necessary that everything should be done at once. What we ask for from the Allied Powers should be done here and now. We do not rely on mere promises about the future. We have had bitter experience of promises having been broken. They also suspect our promise to fight with them against the Axis. Let us come together today and simultaneously decide both the issues—the freedom of India and India's complete participation in the war efforts. Let there be a simultaneous declaration of India's independence and the signing of a treaty between India and the United Nations. If you do not trust us in this we cannot trust you either."

Unfortunately this invitation was not destined to be accepted.

After an hour of the President's eloquence, the still, small voice of the Mahatma spoke. It was as if one had passed from tempestuous rain to genial sunlight. It was as if one had battled and buffeted with mighty

waves and had at last reached a haven of refuge, the tranquil waters of an inland lake, bottomless and blue

The Mahatma's speech was in the nature of a catechism, a warning and an admonition "Do not follow me, because it is the fashion to do so, follow me only if you feel within yourself that I am right," was the burden of his speech When they were about to consider an important question, the leader was admonishing them not to follow him in blindness, as if he were the chosen of the Gods How different, I thought, from the technique, where a henchman and follower screamed amidst the deafening roar of drums and trumpets, "Lead us Fuehrer and we will follow you", and then the Fuehrer in a mad lust for self-glorification lead them to death and destruction of themselves and of others

"If there is the slightest communal taint in your mind, keep off the struggle"

"Give up the attitude of mind which welcomes Japan"

"Do not wish to be the inheritors of all power It belongs, not to you but to the people of India"

"Be Non-violent in action if not in thought This is the least I expect from you"

Such were some of the injunctions which Mahatma Gandhi addressed to his followers, in the course of his speech

After a short interval for tea Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru ascended the rostrum He made one of his usual fighting speeches In fact he made two, one in Hindustani and the other in English After the English speech, one of the American correspondents remarked —"Your Nehru is an orator" All the same I liked his Hindustani speech better It seemed to me that in his English

speech he was too conscious that he was speaking for the special benefit of the representatives of the World Press. He rambled off into the ancient glory of Indian civilisation and the greatness of the civilisations and peoples of Asia. It was all very grand but somewhat beside the point. Oratory is the last thing for which we value Jawahar. Only for a short moment when he touched on the "rotten, breaking, creaking, squeaking and shaking machinery" of the Government of India, he became impressive. Nehru speaks best when he loses his temper.

And while Nehru's eloquence flowed, the Mahatma drank his glass of fruit juice and ate his 'supper' in public with a long wooden spoon.

As if three such speeches were not enough to cause a surfeit, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel followed with an unusually brilliant speech. It was a piece of bitter, biting, stinging sarcasm. It was a significant fact that Sardar Patel, who is reputedly not a popular figure and who is even said to scorn popularity, made the most popular speech and received the most tremendous cheers—more in fact than even the Mahatma.

One passage from Sardar Patel's speech must be noted as an index of what, even the most bitter critic of Britain felt regarding the Japanese. He asserted that he did not want Japan in India, and, obviously referring to Subhas Bose sarcastically said—"He who wanted Japan has already left this country." Japan professed love for India and promised her Freedom. But India was not going to be fooled by the Axis broadcasts. If Japan genuinely wished to secure Freedom for India why did the Japanese Government still continue the war against China? It would be Japan's duty to set China free before talking of India's freedom.

While Friday was an all-star show, the next day the voice of Demos had its full say. Dr. Mohomed Ashraf, a Muslim by birth, an intellectual, a marxist by faith, polished and sophisticated, speaking fluent Hindustani in a clear faultless voice; Pandit Bala-krishna Sharma, a stalwart Hindu, with a mop of greying hair, beginning his speech with a quotation from Tulsidas and speaking in a language which but for verbs was pure Sanskrit, in a fearless thundering voice, Sardar Pratapsing, a black-bearded militant Sikh pouring vituperation on the communists, and charging them with forgetting India because of their love for Russia, Acharya Narendra Dev, with his small, quick, piercing eyes moving in harmony with the flow of his undiluted eloquence, Mr. T. Prakasam, rugged, almost ugly, speaking in a rasping and self-confident voice, Maulana Nuruddin Bihari, a zealous and devout Muslim, and once an uncompromising, almost harsh critic of the Congress leadership—men of widely different types spoke without reserve from the same platform. And as I saw and heard them one after another, it seemed to me that not the least function that the Congress had fulfilled was to act as a solvent of all the communal, cultural, linguistic and provincial differences which separate Indian from Indian.

Nor were other hints wanting that the Congress had set the pace for the evaluation of a common Indian culture. While Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu nursed in Sanskrit traditions, used Urdu words like *Ta'ajjub* (wonder), *Sadma* (grief), *Kaffara* (Penance), *Behtar* (better), and *Deen* (religion), Dr. Mahomed Ashraf, a Muslim, rolled over his tongue words of Sanskrit origin like *Andolan* (revolution), *Janata* (public), and *Shakti* (strength). While Dr. Ashraf began his address with the words *Sabhapati aur bhainiyon*, a

Hindu like Pandit Nehru spoke of Sardar Saheb aur  
Biradarane Vatan

It also seemed to me that the Congress had not only set the pace for a cultural evolution of a United India but it had also set up a norm for the practice of Democracy. Take the case of Pandit Balakrishna Sharma. That stalwart gentleman had given notice of what he called an amendment. It was nothing more nor less than a complete re-write of the resolution in his own language. The President naturally ruled it out of order. Not in the least chagrined Panditji wanted to know if he would get a chance to speak. Why not? He did get his chance.

He started with the remark that he had not much hope that what he had to say would alter the situation in the least. Voices from the audience then told him to sit down. "Do not fear brother, I will sit down presently" said the Pandit. Meanwhile as a soldier of the Congress it was his right and privilege to express his opinions. And then for nearabout twenty minutes, he entered a scathing indictment of the Congress leaders and ultimately concluded his speech by saying —"I have told you what I think. It is now for you to command, and like a soldier I will obey."

The same right of freedom of speech and vote was again vindicated by the President when the Communist members insisted on taking their amendments to a division. They were greeted with cries of "shame" from the audience. But the President silenced them with an imperious gesture, and roundly asserted that the Communists had every right to ask for a vote on their amendments. Later, almost the first thing that Mahatma Gandhi did in the course of his speech was to congratulate the Communists on their courage of conviction.

And that speech! Mahatma Gandhi is 74 and he spoke for two hours and a half. My great sorrow is that I was too done up to be able to take full notes of his speech. I am afraid that no report so far published has done anything like even faint justice to that speech. Every word of it had a special significance.

He dwelt at length on his personal relations with Lord Linlithgow, described how the Viceroy's daughter and son-in-law had been introduced to him and sought his blessings. He described all that he owed to English letters and philosophy and to English friends like Chralie Andrews. He mentioned that the Metropolitan of India had sent him his blessings.

He also described his meeting with Marshal and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, the redoubtable Allies of Britain, and narrated in simple words how he and Madame had fallen in love with each other.

When he was speaking on in this strain, I wondered how all this was relevant. Had the Mahatma a presentiment of what was coming, I wonder!

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NOTE—A substantial portion of this chapter has already appeared as an article in the Sunday Chronicle —August 23 1942. The citations from speeches made at the A I C C are also taken from reports published in the Bombay Chronicle.

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## 7 THE NINTH OF AUGUST

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**S**UNDAY, August 9, 1942 is a memorable day in the history of India. It is also a memorable day in the reporting life of myself and many of my journalist colleagues.

The previous night, Mahatma Gandhi finished his valedictory speech at the A I C C at a quarter past ten. And by the time we had snatched an odd meal and had come to office to do the day's 'copy' the long resolution of the Governor-General-in-Council, dealing with the resolution of the A I C C just passed, was already on the ticker.

It was obvious then that the Government could not possibly have received a report of the speech of Mahatma Gandhi, in the course of which he had more than once stated he would seek an interview with the Viceroy. The resolution adopted by the A I C C had not indicated what the actual programme of action was to be, but had only requested Mahatma Gandhi "to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken." Gandhi himself, in the course of his speech, had outlined the general character of the movement, but had not given out the actual items of the programme. He had said that his negotiations with the Viceroy might take three weeks, and had asked his followers to hold themselves in patience till then. Therefore, we had no reason to expect any immediate and sensational developments.

But from the resolution of the Governor-General-in-Council, it seemed that the Government had decided its line of action long before, and it has now

become clear that they had done so, weeks ahead Mahatma Gandhi had concluded his speech at a quarter past ten. Within an hour afterwards the entire resolution of the Government had been creeded from Delhi and we had all seen it in Bombay.

It would appear that no member of Working Committee, with the possible exception of Mrs Sarojini Naidu expected that Government would precipitate matters, and that must be why after arrest she twitted Sardar Patel about her superior foresight.

It is not without significance that "the change from political methods to the iron hand in India" occurred the day after Parliament went off for a fortnight of recess. At a subsequent debate several members of Parliament drew attention to and protested against this fact (*Manchester Guardian*, September, 12, 1942).

But that night we were in no mood to speculate about the time when the decision was taken. Our minds were exercised by one passage in the resolution. While stating that the Government of India would discharge their task "in face of the challenge now thrown down by the Congress," the Government resolution indicated that any action they might take would be "preventive of the interruption of war effort and the other dangers to which they have referred rather than punitive."

With our minds troubled by the exact import of the word "preventive" we settled down to work. We were hardly half way through our copy when there walked into our office two fellow reporters from another office.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I say, read out your notes of Nehru. I have missed something."



"But why walk all the way? What is the matter with the telephone?"

"Out of order"

That was bad, we thought. But it was not long before we discovered that our phone also had gone dead. We could not get into touch with the world outside. That was a clear signal that something was up. So we got through our copies as fast as we could, scamping our work. This is one of the reasons why no report has done justice to the proceedings of the AICC, and particularly the speech of Mahatma Gandhi.

A similar move was afoot elsewhere, and reporters from several offices were trying to get into touch with each other. And we did. An un-announced conference of reporters was held on the darkened footpath of Sir Phirozeshah Mehta Road and a plan of action was devised. The greatest difficulty that the 'conference' had to face was the desire on the part of every reporter to be at Birla House. That was clearly not possible. The difficulty was at last got over by the magnanimous self-sacrifice of some who surrendered their claim to be present there and agreed to keep vigil at other places which did not hold possibilities of the same thrilling experiences, but which were equally necessary to watch.

Professional practice and etiquette prevents my disclosing the names of the reporters involved although it is not hard to guess that I was 'somewhere' in the picture, but I can reveal that Birla House, as the most important place, had, assigned to it, a quota of three. When the reporters reached the place, there were already a score or so of men and women who had come to attend the early morn-

ing prayer The Mahatma was too weary after the previous night's work, and he decided to have prayers in his bed Word was sent to the waiting devotees, and the tall gates of Birla House remained shut, but the people continued to wait hoping to have Gandhiji's '*Darshan*' in the morning

After waiting till 5 a m the news hounds were about to go away In fact their taxi had moved away a couple of hundred yards, when one of them looking out by chance, saw beams of light, obviously of headlights of cars coming down the Mount Pleasant Road During days of black-out regulations only Police cars could have such beams The reporters jumped out and raced back to the gates of Birla House

The police were already there They called for the Gurkha watchman, but that dignitary was not to be found A police officer climbed over the gates and slipping between the overhanging creepers landed on the other side and fetched the Gurkha But that sleepy fellow had mislaid his keys and took some time to find them

Meanwhile two of the excited reporters managed to steal up to another tall gate and begged and entreated the watchman there to open the gate silently But the servant of a rich man is the last to be gifted with imagination or to see reason The gate was too tall and the Gurkha was too obdurate The police, of course, would not allow anybody to get in That was not all The reporters soon found that the police would not allow them to go away either They were under a kind of temporary detention

That was too bad The reporters waited impatiently Presently the people at the gate, who were

slowly increasing, were becoming restless. The reporters saw their chance in this restlessness and fostered and encouraged it. And so a score of them made a sudden dash to go in. The police undertook a flanking movement in order to stop them. That was the reporters' chance. While the police officers were dealing with the crowd, two of them got away and raced to the waiting taxi.

And so it was that in spite of the great precautions taken by the police to prevent the news of the arrests of Mahatma Gandhi and others getting abroad prematurely, it was flashed out to the world a good 20 minutes before he was actually taken away, and some Bombay papers were able to bring out special supplements announcing the arrests even while the train which was to take them away was still on the platform at Victoria Terminus. It was an exclusive Indian scoop. The army of 'war correspondents' and 'foreign correspondents' from British and American journals were happily asleep in their luxury hotels—asleep while a revolution was bursting under their noses.

Touching scenes were witnessed both inside and outside Birla House when India's chosen leader, world revered, 74 year old Mahatma Gandhi was taken away. Soon after the arrival of the police he was informed that they had come to execute three warrants of arrest against himself, Mr Mahadev Desai and Miraben Kasturba Gandhi and Mr Pyarelal Sharma were informed that although they were not under arrest, they would be allowed to accompany Mahatma Gandhi if they so desired. But both of them declined to accept the offer.

Gandhiji then took his usual breakfast of goat's milk and fruit juice. As soon as he was ready, a Muslim member of his Sewagram Ashram recited some verses from the *Quoran*. This was followed by the singing of the Mahatma's favourite hymn "*Vaishnava Janato*" by members of his party and the Birla family.

Gandhiji's kit, which was quickly got ready consisted of a few personal belongings, a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a book of Ashram verses, a copy of the *Quoran*, an Urdu primer and his inevitable *charka*.

Before boarding the car Gandhiji was garlanded and *kumkum* was put on his forehead by Mrs R D Birla. Mahatmaji, smiling pleasantly at the members of his host's family, exchanged greetings with them, picked up his staff and stepped lightly into the big sedan car which was waiting to carry him away.

As Gandhiji's car preceded by a police car and followed by another empty car, presumably meant for his luggage, passed out of the gates, the little crowd of waiting people stood by in respectful silence. Some of them shed silent tears.

Along with Gandhiji, the President and Members of the Congress Working Committee and other prominent Congressmen, numbering 54 in all were arrested in the city of Bombay. Almost simultaneously the Congress House in the City was occupied by the police as also the pandal of the AICC and the Gowalia Tank recreation ground. The Congress Working Committee, the All-India Congress Committee, the Provincial Congress Committees of Bombay, Gujerat, Maharashtra and Karnataka were declared unlawful. All meetings and

processions were banned and the entire city police force augmented by the reserve police and military contingents, was mobilised to meet any situation that might arise, as a result of the arrest of Congress Leaders

An impressive rally of Congress volunteers and Desh Sevikas, which was held according to schedule at the Gowalia Tank maidan, was asked to disperse and when they failed to do so, tear gas was used. The volunteers lay down on their faces and some of them refused to move till four chargers were hurled on to them. A lathi charge was also made to clear the crowds. The Congress Tricolour which had been flown over the flag staff in front of the A I C C Pandal was pulled down, and volunteers who came to its rescue were beaten off.

All over the city, a gigantic *hartal* had come into force. Shops were closed. Vehicles did not move. Trams and buses were held up in long rows. Scenes of mob frenzy were witnessed everywhere. The police had to make repeated charges to clear the crowds.

We had been awake the whole night. Without a wash, without food or drink we had to keep on working. By the time we cleared our copies for the *dak* edition of the day, we had been working non-stop for 26 hours, but for many of us there was to be no rest.

A public meeting to be addressed by Mahatma Gandhi had been announced the previous day. And in spite of his being arrested it was intended to hold the meeting and Mrs. Gandhi was to address it. One of the biggest crowds known to Bombay had

gathered in and around the area, which had been occupied by the police. No meeting could be held. Mrs. Gandhi, Mr. Pyarelal Sharma and Dr. Sushila Nair were arrested in the evening and were taken to join Gandhiji. But the crowds would not disperse. They braved repeated tear gas attacks. In that mood they were ready even for bullets.

Before the day was out, five persons had been killed and 20 others had received bullet wounds as a result of police firing about a dozen times in the city. And as the news spread disorders of every kind broke out in every corner of India.

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## 8 THE LAST WORD IS NOT YET

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**T**HE deplorable and precipitate turn which Indian politics took on August 9, 1942, still continues. The narration of the various incidents connected with the disturbances that have since been taking place does not fall within the scope of this book. They are not political facts in themselves. But their nature, causes and effects are important political facts and have to be taken notice of.

The first few days witnessed scenes of mass frenzy everywhere, almost as if the people had completely lost their balance. This was followed by a stage of sabotage and disruption of communications. Then there were attempts to manufacture and use crude bombs, which had very often results far from those which could have been intended or desired by those who were dealing with these bombs. Side by side there have been attempts to carry out the orthodox Congress programmes of Civil Resistance by taking out processions and holding meetings in defiance of official bans.

While words like 'Hooliganism' and 'Criminal movement' have been freely used to describe the nature of the troubles, and while admittedly horrible offences have been committed here and there, it is also pointed out that the disturbances have been free from certain ugly characteristics, common in similar disturbances known to history. No sexual offences and outrages on women have been reported. Attacks on private property have not been widespread and there have been no violent outbursts of racial feeling.

It is impossible as yet to assess the extent of these disturbances or their effect in material and psychological terms. But some idea as to their extent can be

gathered from official figures. Answering questions put to him Sir Reginald Maxwell, Home Member, informed the Central Assembly on September 16, 1942 that the casualties caused by police firing according to most reports were 340 killed and 850 wounded. The figures were incomplete especially as regards parts of Bihar. The casualties caused by the military were 318 killed and 153 wounded. The number of casualties suffered by Government forces were Police—31 killed and a very large number injured, Military—11 killed and 16 injured, Civil officials excluding Post and Telegraph department—seven killed and 16 injured. Earlier Sir Reginald had also stated that the military had been called out in no less than 60 places to assist the Civil Power. It was stated on another occasion that planes were used in five places to disperse crowds by machine gun fire.

Much later on February 12, 1943 the Home Member again stated that firing had to be resorted to 538 times up to about the end of the year 1942 in connection with the disturbances. The number of persons killed by police or military firing was 940 and injured 1,630.

60,229 persons had been arrested up to about the end of the year. The number of persons convicted was approximately 26,000. Approximately 18,000 persons had been detained under Rules 26 and 129 of the Defence of India Rules. The number of persons actually in custody was approximately 14,000 convicted persons, 11,000 detained persons.

(But a later Reuter message dated London, May 20, reads as follows:

The total number of people imprisoned for offences in connection with the Congress campaign in India upto March 15 is 34,895 while 11,623 have been subject to detention. The number in the prison on March 1 was 23,071 and the number indefinitely detained slightly in excess of 8,000. These figures were given in



the Commons to-day by the Secretary for India, Mr. Amery He added the figures did not cover the North-West Frontier Province "

The figures given by various Government spokesmen seem to be inconsistent )

The Home Member could not give figures for the number of persons sentenced to death or the number executed At a conservative estimate (made only from irregular reports in newspapers) I should think that the number of persons who have been awarded the capital sentence is about two score Some half-a-dozen have already been executed

Obviously these figures do not cover events in the Indian States Similar disturbances have taken place in Mysore, Rajkot, Kolhapur, Sangli, Baroda, Hyderabad and elsewhere In answer to a question in the Representative Assembly in Mysore it was stated in October last that by then about 2 000 persons had been arrested in the State According to a government communique 11 persons were killed by police firing in Bangalore City in one series of incidents on August 16 and 17 last These figures are illustrative of what happened in the States also

As far as the causes of these disturbances are concerned, Government have repeatedly stated that most, if not all, these incidents have been the result of the decision of the Congress to launch a mass struggle They have also stated that there is ample evidence to prove that the Congress had made elaborate preparations with the purpose of doing much that has been done

The Viceroy has virtually held the Congress responsible for "these murders, the burning alive of police officials, the wrecking of trains, the destruction of property, the misleading of these young students which has done so much harm to India's good name and the

Congress Party" (letter to Mahatma Gandhi—January 13, 1943)

To this Mahatma Gandhi has replied laying the whole blame at the door of the Government of India "My answer is that the government goaded the people to the point of madness. They started leonine violence in the shape of the arrests already referred to. That violence is not any the less so, because it is organised on a scale so gigantic that it displaces the Mosaic Law of 'tooth for tooth' by that of ten thousand to one." (letter of January 29, 1943) Mr James Maxton, in the course of the debate in the House of Commons had been more emphatic "I do not believe any Indian politician, any supporter of Congress, any average Indian ever did anything to burn a policeman" (This has not been published in India. It is taken from a report of the debate in the *Manchester Guardian* of Saturday, September 12, 1942. This report is revealing in many respects)

Among the more distant causes of these disturbances may be cited the exaltation of violence inherent in boosting the war, which has been going on for the last several years, the premium set on the preaching of Non-violence on the ground that it interferes with the war effort, and the constant description, as noble and patriotic, of the acts of sabotage carried out against the German conqueror in the occupied countries of Europe.

Whatever the cause of these disturbances may be, it is obvious that nobody desires, or ought to desire their continuation. And it is easily understandable that the one way of ending them is to attack the basic cause and bring about a political settlement. It was because this is so clearly realised that repeated attempts have been made with that end in view. The Working Committee of the Muslim League which met in September last took up a somewhat non-committal attitude. While expressing its readiness to "consider any proposals and

negotiate with any party on a footing of equality for the setting up of a provisional government" the League called upon the British Government to come forward without any delay with an unequivocal declaration guaranteeing to the Muslims the right of self-determination

The Hindu Mahasabha which met a little later at Delhi bravely tried to step into the breach and appointed a special committee to see if an understanding could be arrived at among all parties. But that committee did not meet with any encouraging response.

In the meanwhile Mr C Rajagopalachari expressed his willingness to go to England if he were given a plane and a passport and as a preparatory step sought an interview with Mahatma Gandhi. But permission was refused. Permission was also refused to Mr William Phillips, personal envoy of President Roosevelt in India.

So far the last word in the Indian political field has been that of Mr Churchill. Speaking in the Commons on September 10, 1942 he said "The broad principles of the Declaration made by the British Government which formed the basis of the mission of the Lord Privy Seal (Sir Stafford Cripps) to India must be taken as representing the settled policy of the British Crown and Parliament. Those principles stand in their full scope and integrity. No one can add to them and no one can take anything away."

But he gave a more valuable indication of his mind when he went on to say "This, however, does not end the matter. The Indian Congress Party does not represent All India. It does not represent the majority of the people of India. It does not even represent the Hindu masses. It is a political organisation built round a party machine and sustained by certain financial interests."

Mr Maxton, in the course of the debate which followed (one extract cited *supra*) made the position perfectly clear. "Neither the Prime Minister nor the Secretary for India had the slightest desire to give self-government to India at all (cheers) It was part of the political philosophy of the *Herrenvolk*" (Taken from *Manchester Guardian*)

Mr Maxton is further quoted as having said "Don't wait until you have got to concede to force what you could quite easily have granted out of decency"

But in politics, as in all human affairs there is nothing like the 1st word. The tide turns at low water as well as at high. It is implicit in the remarks of Mr Churchill himself that if there were an united demand on behalf of a body of men who could claim to represent India, the government was bound to yield. There was such a demand, a united demand, almost a unanimous demand from Indians of all sections and ranks for the release of Mahatma Gandhi when he undertook a fast of 21 days from February 10, 1943. But the Government did not yield.

The country had to pass through three weeks of agonising suspense, as India's man of destiny lay fasting at the Aga Khan's palace. Would he crown his fighting career with one fight more, the best and the last? Would he end his life of sacrifice by the highest sacrifice? That doubt and agony brought all India together and finally exposed the irresponsible and wooden character of the administration.

But Mahatma Gandhi has happily survived—survived of course, to carry on his relentless struggle for justice to India. And already attempts are being made to see that the unity which was achieved in demanding his release is organised and harnessed to forge and press home a united demand in the political field, which will at last lead India to Freedom and to Victory.